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ENGLAND

BEFORE THE NORMAN CONQUEST,

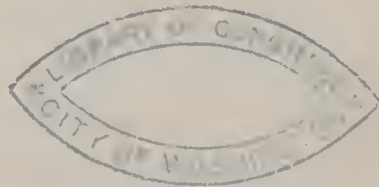
Considered with especial reference to its  
Literary Character.

BY G. SYDENHAM, C.M., M.R.C.P.,

AUTHOR OF "NOTES OF LESSONS," ETC..

HEAD MASTER OF THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL, CANNOCK.

Dieses schöne Land  
Ist mein Vaterland.



Walsall:

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Ms. A. 15, 02.

## PREFACE.

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ENGLISHMEN of the present age are too apt to enjoy the comforts which a merciful Providence has placed within their reach without duly reflecting upon the several steps by which those comforts have been attained. Wellington and Nelson may have become "household words," yet a large portion of our population would hesitate to decide whether a naval or land battle was fought at Trafalgar. If such be the case, what know they of Blenheim or Ramillies, of Bosworth, Barnet, or Evesham? And if they are ignorant of the great military events which have characterized their country's history, what must be the state of their knowledge with regard to the social or literary history of their fatherland.

If ignorance of such topics as I have alluded to be a fact, the cause certainly cannot be attributed to a want of well-written works upon the various subjects. Histories of England have been published in every variety of style, upon every possible topic, and at every conceivable price; and yet, notwithstanding this fact, I venture to intrude another. I am not vain enough to suppose that this luminary of mine will be the panacea to dispel existing darkness; but I do know that it will not, fortunately, render the darkness more intense. I do know that it will

penetrate into homes where such a work has rarely made its appearance before, and like its compeers may have some influence upon the minds of its readers.

But it is not sufficient that a work should be written with such negative prospects as those I have alluded to. I should be suspected of a want of truthfulness if I asserted that I did not expect positive advantages to accrue from its perusal.

I do not say that I have made some grand discovery of a MS. that has not recently seen the light: on the contrary, I am well aware that the bulk of facts to which I have directed attention in the text may be noticed in histories already before the public. But one thing I do claim for it, viz., that it contains matter referred to only in large and expensive books.—I claim for it the privilege of being the first moderate sized work that contains a systematic history of the literary condition of the early inhabitants of this country.

A few words will convey to the reader the necessary information respecting its design and the object of its publication. In its present form it is necessarily fragmentary. Such was not its contemplated character, however. After the successful publication of my “Notes of Lessons,” I proposed to myself to write a second part on School Organization, &c., prefixing thereto a brief sketch of the history of education from the earliest period to the present time. I accordingly commenced my researches for materials. So diffuse were the notices of the early literary characters of the country, yet so interesting, that I determined to write a popular literary history of the British isles. Very soon I found, however, that so intimately was the political and social history of England blended with the educational, that to write popularly of the one it would be necessary to allude to

the other. Both were accordingly touched upon; but ere I had reached the period of the Norman conquest I had arranged matter enough for an octavo volume of four hundred pages, and that to continue the work would be too great a tax upon my spare time, even supposing my abilities to have been equal to the task. But a yet further difficulty presented itself. Unless I could get some publisher to undertake the expense of its publication I could not hope to see it in print. I had several offers made me, but none which I deemed I could with due prudence accept. I accordingly threw the MS. aside, and should possibly never have looked into it again, had not the following circumstances induced me to make use of at least a portion of it.

I found upon my appointment to the Mastership of the Grammar School, at Cannock, the buildings in a miserable condition, with no funds to improve them, and I accordingly offered the profits which might be derived from the sale of 1,000 copies of the portion which I had selected (if such number could be disposed of by private subscription) to the trustees to improve the condition of the building. The trustees accepted the offer, and a canvass was forthwith commenced. Within a period of four months eight hundred and eighty copies have been subscribed for, the remaining one hundred and twenty being unsold.

In this abridgment of my work those portions relating to Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, and the smaller islands, have, with a few exceptions, been omitted, as well as those portions relating particularly to the grammar and composition of the language, specimens of the writings of the literary characters, and notices of some of the characters themselves. These parts were left out to limit the expense of publication.



I may only further observe that should the sale of a future edition of the work prove satisfactory, I shall (D.V.) continue the history of our country to the present time, in a series of similarly small manuals.

My grateful acknowledgements are due to P. F. Hussey, Esq., of Wyrley Grove, for the use of his valuable library, and for the kind personal assistance he rendered me during the progress of the work. To the Revs. Dr. Rowley and F. T. Blackburne, to Miss Parkes, Mr. Sluter, and Mr. Sanders, for the trouble they took in procuring works of reference for me for the undertaking.

In laying this manual before the public, I have to claim for a young author the benefit of their forbearance, and to request that the mantle of their indulgence may be thrown over the numerous defects which he fears will be found to disfigure it.

*Cannock, February 6th, 1861.*

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# ENGLAND BEFORE THE CONQUEST.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE ANCIENT BRITONS.

1. How vast is the change wrought in the character of a people in a few short years! How stupendous then when centuries intervene! Could the idolaters of Ahab's reign have been the descendants of the patriarchs? Were the effeminate Romans who lived under the later emperors the real offspring of the heroes of the age of Romulus? Do not the present Persians, Egyptians, Grecians, and Romans bear feigned names? Enervated by luxury, they certainly manifest no resemblance to their forefathers. Nebuchadnezzar, and Cyrus, and Pharaoh, and Cæsar, form a galaxy, exciting in our breasts a wonder that their descendants should evince no desire to emulate the deeds of such illustrious ancestors. But the empires they governed performed the specific objects for which they were exalted, and then their power and grandeur departed for ever. Our view, however, need not be so extensive. Let us but compare our own Saxon countrymen of the nineteenth century with their forefathers, the followers of Hengist? Do we not behold the savage transformed into the man? Let the followers of Voltaire proclaim that this almost miracle is the effect of chance, but we will ascribe it to the design of its true author, the Almighty disposer of events. Here was a character raised up, perhaps persecuted at the time, but destined to influence largely future generations. There a seed sown, on barren



earth, it may be, appointed to grow in the mould of its own decay, and to be the parent of a vigorous offspring. Such characters have formed eras by their brilliant achievements, and by changing the manners and customs, and marking the character of contemporary or succeeding generations. Thus there are Alfred, and Beckett, and Wickliffe, and Caxton, and Cranmer, and Bacon, and Newton, and Chalmers, and Shuttleworth, and a legion more of almost equal merit, who have influenced the condition of their race. By what means? By their writings and their deeds. Under their tuition the people have passed from the barbarous to the civilized state. Britain, with its ignorant savages, has merged into Christian England. Like all other pristine states, our country stumbled on in darkness until the springs of education were touched with the rays of divine light, and she became subject to its potent influence.

2. We cannot but regard literature and education as the great active instruments in changing the character of mankind. Christianity, supplanting the absurdities of Paganism, and influencing the opinions of the great, becomes the main-spring that directs this intellectual machinery,<sup>1</sup> and it is to the history of education and literature in the British isles that we now direct our attention.

3. History informs us of three great migrations of people from the east, each comprising the descendants of Japheth. The first of these migrations settled in the western and southern parts of Europe. This was the great Celtic family—the Celtæ of Cæsar. The second migration from Asia peopled the central and north-western portions of the European continent. This formed the Gothic, or Teutonic, race. They occupied the evacuated territories of the Celts, and gradually supplanted them even in their furthest retreats. The third, or Slavonian, migration settled in the northern and eastern parts of Europe,<sup>2</sup> probably encountering such checks in following the footsteps of the Teutones as induced them to remain content with the sterile

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<sup>1</sup> “At all periods, in all lands, religion has been glorified as an engine of civilization, sciences, letters, and arts; all the intellectual and moral pursuits have claimed a share in this glory; and we give them praise and honour in our opinion when we admit that their claims are just.”—GUIZOT’S HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION IN EUROPE.

<sup>2</sup> See preface to Bosworth’s *A. Saxon Grammar*, p 5, &c.

soil and rigorous climate of the north. Europe consequently contains a large portion of the great family of the eldest son of Noah. "God shall enlarge Japheth."<sup>1</sup> Behold the prophecy fulfilled! The earliest notice of this people<sup>2</sup> is found in the pages of Herodotus.<sup>3</sup> "The river Ister, beginning from the Celtæ and the city of Pyrene, flows through the whole of Europe, for the Celtæ are beyond the pillars of Hercules, and they border on the Cynesians, who are the furthest people in Europe towards the west."<sup>4</sup>

We must not suppose, however, that the barbarous tribes who issued from Asia at once selected some favoured spot, thenceforth discarded their nomadic habits, and immediately merged into peaceable citizens. Such a notion would be as opposed to reason as it is to fact. The truth is they left their own too thickly peopled or unproductive territory, and being inclined by nature as by habit to a nomadic life wandered about from place to place until circumstances induced them to settle down. They were following the purposes of Jehovah, though undesignedly on their own parts. They had multiplied exceedingly—to us almost incredibly. They were to continue to "be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it."<sup>5</sup> They were unwittingly fulfilling the divine command. They took with them their national occupations. Had they been previously shepherds, they still continued to guide their flocks to the most verdant pasture. Had they been accustomed to derive their support from the chase and the spontaneous productions of nature? Ages must elapse ere the wild sports of the field should be exchanged for the peaceful occupations of civilized life.

4. We know nothing definitely of the true origin of the Celtæ, and little of the steps by which they progressed from east to west; yet we infer from analogy, and from their subsequent history, that, invited forwards by undefined hopes of a more promising region, and receiving pressure from new emigrants behind, they at length reached the extremity of

1 Genesis 9. 27.

2 They were at first called Hyperboreans, and afterwards Celts. See "Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland," by Macpherson, p 19.

3 Hist. vi. 49.

4 As quoted by Dr. Giles in his valuable History of the Ancient Britons.

5 Genesis i. 28.

Europe on the west, and there took up their abode. A portion of this great family settled in Gaul and sent thence a colony into Britain.

5. The periods of these different migrations from the east are totally unknown. They took place at an era prior to authentic history, and though conjecture may step in to supply the place of fact, as it often does in such cases, yet it is vain to encourage a morbid curiosity to know the particulars of matters, an account of which no contemporary writer has vouchsafed any information; to learn the history of peoples which no historian, perhaps for centuries after those wild tribes obtained a rude importance, has deigned to enquire into; respecting which no monuments of antiquity remain to shed the slightest glimmer of light; where, alas! tradition and conjecture alone remained to be depended upon. "When we want to see, at any rate where no historical light is to be had, the mind's eye is dimmed like that of the body when it is violently strained in the dark."<sup>1</sup>

6. The northern portion of the original inhabitants of this island were Celts, differing slightly in their colloquial language<sup>2</sup> from their ancestral neighbours, the Gauls, but in their sacred rites, superstitions, and bravery identical. They belonged to the first great stream of Asiatic migration. The southern portion, however, are asserted by Cæsar to have passed over from Belgium.<sup>3</sup> Sir Francis Palgrave and others are of opinion that these were of the Teutonic race.<sup>4</sup> They were governed by a tyrannical priesthood—the Druids.<sup>5</sup> These Druids were at once the priests, legislators, physicians, and *schoolmasters* of the people. I should rather say, perhaps, that they were the teachers of their own body, for it was undoubtedly their only safe policy to keep the *people* in ignorance, lest they should imbibe notions calculated to cast a doubt upon the mysteries and generally ridiculous dogmas which they taught. Too well, indeed, is a mere superficial observer aware that a doubt once entertained upon an article of false faith often leads to a renunciation of that doctrine.

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<sup>1</sup> Niebuhr's Lectures on Roman History, vol. i. p 99.

<sup>2</sup> Tacitus. Life of Agricola, c. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Lib. 5, c. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Bede asserts that the southern Britons came from Armorica. Lib. 1, c. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Cæsar, book vi.



Full well then did the crafty Druids foresee the probable destruction of their vast fabric of superstition before the light of education, and hence did they retain a not disinclined people in the bonds of ignorance. True they assembled the young around them, and taught them, but it was orally.<sup>1</sup> The two most essential elements of instruction—reading and writing, without which no great educational advance can be made—were untaught. The memory, however, was crowded with no insignificant notions of natural philosophy, astronomy, arithmetic, and botany, and if vast were the errors and numerous the superstitions connected with these branches of instruction, we wonder not.

7. To enumerate the particulars of the amount of learning they possessed; a just account of their learned men; a minute description of their modes of instruction, however much desired, is simply impossible. The learned Dr. Henry<sup>2</sup> has entered into a full discussion of the probable amount of learning they possessed. The positive information to be deduced from his extensive examination of the subject is very small indeed. They knew something of astronomy—probably much. That they paid great attention to the revolutions of the heavenly bodies is certain, but that their knowledge could be accurate is more than doubtful. Nay, it is impossible, with the absence, or at least the imperfection, of astronomical instruments, and their superficial knowledge of those sciences so intimately connected with the subject of the stars, that they could have possessed any very accurate notions of astronomy, even as the science was then understood by the learned. Like the Jews of old they computed their time by nights instead of days.<sup>3</sup> They may have had some idea of the nature of the inequalities of the moon's surface, but with regard to the amount of knowledge which they possessed of astronomy in general, or of the moon in particular, we know absolutely nothing; and to discuss probabilities would be of very little use. We may speak similarly of their arithmetic and geometry; for although Cæsar says that they gave instruction to their youths "concerning the magnitude of the world

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1 Cæsar lib. 6, c. 12 and 13.

2 History of England, vol. ii, lib. 1, c. 4.

3 Cæsar lib. 6, c. 17.

and earth," we have no means of ascertaining what their notions were with regard to this subject, or by what process they arrived at their conclusion. Their geographical knowledge would probably be of the most meagre character. For although they certainly were in constant communication with the Gauls—although the southern portion of the island was probably peopled from Germany—although the Carthaginians had visited their shores, and bartered with the inhabitants, yet from none of these sources could they be expected to have derived any great amount of information; for at this period they had no native travellers who could furnish them with an account of distant countries; they had no fleets to navigate the ocean; no sailors who could furnish them with a report of its peculiarities or the shores of other lands. They were an isolated people, and their geographical knowledge must have consequently been of a limited nature.

8. Of their knowledge of mechanics and the industrial arts, we have happily more precise information. That they were well versed in those arts which contributed to success in warfare we have abundant means of ascertaining. Cæsar speaks of their fortifications in terms which lead us to believe that they were by no means despicable. Their war chariots inform us that they must have been well acquainted with an important branch of mechanical arts, and this knowledge could only have been obtained after a long course of study and application. Their wicker work was celebrated, their works of clay admired, and the present remains of those stupendous places erected for the celebration of their religious rites excite our wonder, and lead us to enquire whether a people who could transport huge blocks of stone to enormous heights, and could place them in the most delicate positions, had not attained a degree of intellectual development far surpassing what has been ordinarily ascribed to them. I need only allude to the rocking stones in Cornwall, and the ruins at Stonehenge, in confirmation of such views.<sup>1</sup>

9. We are told by Diodorus Siculus,<sup>2</sup> a contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> Henry's History of England, vol ii, c. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Hist. lib. 5.

of Cæsar, that the Druids' counsel was sought by their enemies, and that their power was sufficiently great, and not unfrequently exerted to restrain the rage of contending armies, and stem the torrent of savage bloodshed: and this was accomplished by their eloquence. Men who were continually instructing the pupils crowded around them orally—men who were frequently accustomed to harangue an army before engaging in battle—address popular assemblies—expound laws and inculcate religious observances—may well have acquired the true qualities of orators. Their commanding eloquence swayed the minds of their rude hearers. The British speeches recorded in the pages of Tacitus, though doubtless embellished with the imagery of that eloquent writer, give us a fair view of the estimation in which their powers of speech were held. Thus may we perceive, even in those early ages, the power of intellectual superiority. Men who could successfully separate opposing armies of inflamed and barbarous warriors, enjoyed no mean power—commanded no inconsiderable respect; and this power, and this respect, were entirely obtained through their intellectual qualifications: these furnished them with the means of enchaining the minds of a barbarous people.

10. They transmitted orally, as was before observed, to the youth of the higher classes the knowledge which they had accumulated. Such knowledge was consequently possessed but by few. Cæsar informs us<sup>1</sup> that the estimation in which their learning was held attracted to their lessons numerous scholars from distant parts, who were either sent by their parents or became voluntary pupils. Though abstaining from communicating a knowledge of letters to their assembled scholars, they were not themselves ignorant of the art of writing. From Cæsar also we learn that their pupils sometimes remained under their instruction for a period of twenty years.<sup>2</sup> Cæsar distinctly says that although they do not consider it to be lawful to commit those things relating to religion and learning to writing, “yet in other public and private accounts they commonly use written characters.”<sup>3</sup> It is probable, indeed, that they

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<sup>1</sup> Lib. 6, c. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Cæsar, lib. 6, c. 14.

<sup>3</sup> In some editions of Cæsar we have “Græcis utantur literis.” Cæsar, lib. 6, c. 14.



were acquainted with the use of the Greek characters, though they were doubtless ignorant of the Greek language. Pliny asserts that their knowledge of magic was not less than that of the magi of Persia. "By their abstaining from a hen, a hare, and a goose, from fish also," saith Dion, "and their opinion of the soul's passing after death into other bodies, they may be thought to have studied Pythagoras."<sup>1</sup> Strabo informs us that their information in this respect was derived from the colony of Massilia (Marseilles) in the south of Gaul.<sup>2</sup> The motives which induced the Druids to prohibit a general system of writing are stated by Cæsar to have been, first, that their discipline should not be published to the vulgar, and, secondly, that they should not neglect to cultivate the memory. For the purpose of improving this faculty they were required to learn a large number of verses.<sup>3</sup>

But how, it may be enquired, did the Druids obtain their general knowledge? Were they the sole originators of their own system of Druidism, or did they acquire the knowledge of it from others? Partly from both sources, I imagine. No other race of men that we read of ever had an exact counterpart of their system. It was purely Celtic,—it was common to the whole Celtic race. It was acquired by degrees—it grew with their growth; nurtured by those who were interested in its prosperity, and improved by those who were bent upon perfecting it. Yet it doubtless received extraneous aid. As Dr. Henry hints,<sup>4</sup> it might have received embellishments from the Greek colony of Marseilles, and the philosophy of Pythagoras. If they were astronomers, the rudiments of that art were doubtless at first communicated. If they understood the art of caligraphy, they were not its inventors. Constant study increased their store of facts—their method was their own.

11. But where were their seminaries situated, and what was their character? They were doubtless in connection with their temples, and as these latter were placed in the deepest recesses of the woods, their schools, it may well be

<sup>1</sup> Milton's History of Great Britain, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Lib. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Cæsar, lib. 6, 14.

<sup>4</sup> History of Britain, vol. ii, p. 7.

conceived, were there also. Were we permitted to trespass for a moment upon the imagination, we might easily picture to ourselves a large body of attentive pupils seated on the greensward, with the vaulted arch of heaven as their only canopy; or, perhaps, the shady branches of some gigantic oak interposing to protect them from the piercing rays of a summer's sun. There might we see the venerable Druid standing, with his silvery locks waving in the breeze, whilst, with a kindled eye, animated countenance, and persuasive tongue, some principle is developed, some precept enforced, some threat denounced, or some thrilling incident recited. What a picture might we draw—what a lesson might we enforce—were we permitted to pursue the subject!

12. If we could draw an exciting imaginative picture respecting the educational processes of the ancient Britons,—which might, perhaps, be substantially true, were it grounded upon the data we possess in relation to the Britons, upon the information at our command relative to other tribes of a scarcely more recent period, and of mankind in general—we could also favor the lovers of romance with some extraordinary biographies of fabulous British writers at this early period. The following, taken from Dr. Henry, on the authority of Bale, is a specimen. Perdix, the subject of the memoir, lived in Britain, about the year B. C. 760.

“Perdix, or Partridge, a British prophet, who excelling in genius and learning, particularly in mathematics, by his example roused the indolent minds of others to the pursuit of the same studies. By his curious and constant observation of the stars, he became a famous prophet and prognosticator. In his time, about the year of the world 3198, it rained blood in Britain three whole days, which produced such prodigious swarms of flies that they occasioned a great mortality. As king Rivallo was offering sacrifices in the temple of Diana, according to the manner of these times, Partridge came in, and not only explained the causes of the present calamities, but also pronounced a prophecy of many future events. The king commanded this prophecy to be engraved on large blocks of marble, and placed in the same temple for its preservation. Gildas, a most noble poet and historiographer among the Britons, found this inscription

written in very old language, and translated it into elegant Latin verse."

Such is the character of the history of the writers of this early period.

13. Such was the intellectual state of Britain when first introduced to our notice by the pen of Cæsar. Yet even the moderate attainments alluded to cannot be ascribed to the whole population of the island. In the northern district the natives roamed about almost in a state of nudity. In the midland part they had so far cast off their barbarous nature as to be almost worthy of being denominated shepherds. In the southern portion alone, probably in consequence of its proximity to Gaul and its connection with continental merchants, was any species of learning to be found; whilst the amount of oral instruction that was imparted in the most favoured spots was mingled with the most degrading superstitions.

14. The rudest habitations of the Britons were circular huts, constructed of wood and covered with straw. A hole at the top subserved the twofold purpose of admitting light, and forming an egress for the escape of smoke. These dwellings however may be regarded as their summer tents; for in the winter they appear to have retired to caves, rendered by nature and art warmer than their fragile houses. Remains of some of these dwellings still exist in the western isles of Scotland and in Cornwall.<sup>2</sup> In process of time their rude huts were improved by plasterings of mud, whilst in the more civilised parts of the island houses constructed of wood and stone, and covered with straw, were not uncommon. An assemblage of these huts was called a town. Thus writes Cæsar: "The Britons call that a town where they have been accustomed to assemble to avoid an incursion of enemies, when they have fortified the entangled woods with a rampart and ditch."<sup>3</sup> Strabo says, "that the forests of the Britons were their cities, and that when they had enclosed a very large space with felled streets, they built within it houses for themselves and sheds for their cattle."<sup>4</sup>

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1 History of England, vol. ii, p. 68.

2 Henry's History of Great Britain, vol. ii, p. 113.

3 Lib. 5, c. 21.

4 Lib. 4, p. 200.



15. Woods, forests, and marshes covered the greater portion of the country at that period, over which the Britons roamed in a half naked state. Painted bodies and a loose covering of skins must indeed have given them a most savage appearance. Without any settled avocations, they were now engaged in vindictive warfare with neighbouring tribes. Bows and arrows, spears and clubs, and above all, chariots, with swords in their wheels, formed their chief instruments for military purposes. Now they were engaged in the hunting of the wild boar, or wolf, then abundant in the island; and occasionally may they have been seen engaged in the more peaceful occupations of cultivating the soil, or in the manufacture of simple articles for domestic use, warlike purposes, and religious rites. As a nation they were sunk low in the scale of humanity, yet their subsequent elevation under the influence of civilization, and the hallowing restraints of christianity, displayed the spark of rationality within them—depressed, but not quenched; revealed the soul, the likeness of Divinity, man's distinguishing and most noble part.

## CHAPTER II.

## GENERAL HISTORY OF BRITAIN UNDER THE ROMANS.

1. How long the Britons had been in the island upon the arrival of Cæsar, or how many different expeditions successively arrived here, we have no means of ascertaining. We know that they had been in alliance with their kinsmen, the Gauls, before the time of Cæsar's invasion: that they had fought side by side with them against the legions of Cæsar, and that they were at length to feel the effects of the conqueror's ambition themselves. Cæsar, the great Roman general, having subdued a great portion of Gaul, and aspiring to supreme power in Rome, though circumstances were hardly ripe for the execution of his project, meditated a descent upon this island. Many reasons induced him to take this step. That which he himself assigns for his enterprise is probably a very different one to the true motive which influenced him. He asserts that he was led to come over having learnt that the Gauls had been assisted by the Britons when he was engaged in hostile attacks upon that people.<sup>1</sup> But we must bear in mind that he had a powerful army under his command, the authority over which he was unwilling to relinquish, as it must inevitably have interfered with his contemplated schemes of ambition. Fresh glory was to be acquired by the conquest of a new country. The subjugation of a hostile people would be gratifying to his feelings: his curiosity would be satisfied, and his hopes of enriching himself by the seizure of British pearls realized.<sup>2</sup> To attain his object he sailed for the island in the year B. C. 55, to the confusion of the Britons, who had endeavoured to prevent the execution of his plans by sending ambassadors to Gaul as soon as his intentions became suspected.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cæsar, lib. 4, c. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Henry, vol. i, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



2. Previously to his sailing, however, he assembled Gaulish merchants with the view of ascertaining the character of the country, and its people, which he proposed visiting; but having been unable to glean from them the desired information, he sent Caius Volusenus over on an exploring expedition. Meanwhile he collected ships from every quarter, that he might be in a position to transport his forces upon the return of his spy. The ambassadors sent to Cæsar were graciously received by him. He promised liberally, and sent back with them Comius, an Atrebatian, in his interest, who was to endeavour to inspire the Britons with favourable sentiments towards himself and the Romans. At length, having completed his arrangements, he set sail himself. He did not effect a landing here, however, without considerable opposition, for the Britons having been foiled in their attempt to ward off his expedition, threw Comius into prison and made the most determined resistance. Undisciplined valour, however, was no equal match for the military skill of Cæsar's veterans, who, once landed, induced the Britons to liberate Comius and sue for peace. This was granted them by Cæsar, who, however, upbraided them with their unjust treatment of Comius, and hostages were demanded. The wily Britons now only watched for an opportunity to be revenged upon Cæsar, which was not indeed long in presenting itself. The vessels which should have brought over the Roman cavalry were overtaken by a violent tempest, and most of them compelled to return to the continent. The ships that were with Cæsar were severely shattered, and a cloud speedily overcast the countenances of his soldiers. The Britons were not slow in discovering his disasters. The chiefs gradually withdrew from his camp, and waited for an opportunity to take advantage of his misfortune. At length perceiving his seventh legion foraging, they attacked it, and would probably have annihilated it, had not his timely arrival prevented so terrible a calamity. He had learned from those guarding the camp that there was an unusual dust in the direction taken by the legion, suspected the cause, and afforded efficient assistance. The legion was extricated from its difficulty, but not without suffering severely. The intrepid Britons now prepared to attack the camp itself, but were anticipated and again

defeated. After this battle Cæsar took an early opportunity to return to the continent.<sup>1</sup>

3. Thus was Cæsar's first stay in the island brief. He met with unexpected opposition, and he returned to Gaul to winter his forces there, and determined to obtain large reinforcements for a second invasion. This invasion took place in the following year, and though the Britons, under the leadership of Cassivelaunus, displayed their accustomed bravery, and no small amount of ingenuity, yet they were worsted in many engagements, and were in a few months compelled to yield to Cæsar the hostages he demanded, together with the promise of a yearly tribute. The circumstances of this invasion may be thus briefly enumerated. In the year B. C. 54, Cæsar, having collected several hundred vessels, and a large number of soldiers, sailed for Britain. Finding no enemy on the coast to oppose his landing, as upon his first visit here, he marched into the interior of the country, directing his footsteps towards that part of the island whither he had been informed the Britons had retired. Having at length discovered the forces of the enemy, he prepared to give them battle. The Britons gave way and retreated to the woods, where they had a strongly fortified camp. Their citadel was speedily stormed by the soldiers of the seventh legion, and arrangements made for the pursuit of the fugitives. The orders for this expedition, however, were soon countermanded, for intelligence reached Cæsar that a storm had again shattered his fleet. This induced his immediate return to his vessels. He soon, however, repaired his ships, drew them on shore, and again ventured in pursuit of the enemy. The Britons had by this time collected very large forces to oppose him, which were placed under the command of Cassivelaunus. These were exceedingly harassing to Cæsar, though they proved no insurmountable obstacle to his success. He defeated them, indeed, in every serious encounter. At length defection appeared in their ranks. Several tribes went over to Cæsar. Cassivelaunus did indeed all that prudence could suggest or valour accomplish. Disunion and ignorance, however, opposed to unity and skill, convinced him that further opposi-

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<sup>1</sup> Cæsar, lib. 4, c. 20-37.

tion was useless and induced him to desire peace. This Cæsar was only too ready to grant, being anxious to return to his continental affairs. Having then demanded hostages, the whole of which he could never expect to receive, and levying a tribute which he could not hope to see collected, he returned to receive the congratulations of his friends and to excite the admiration even of his enemies.<sup>1</sup> He never visited this island again, and the Britons were unmolested by the Romans for nearly a century.

4. Little is known of the history of the Britons during this period. They were probably engaged in civil warfare, the defeated party frequently hastening for protection and patronage to Rome. Roman emperors frequently threatened to invade Britain, with the view of exacting the promised tribute from the Britons, who were indeed often too glad to purchase their forbearance by agreeing to their demands. At length, in the year A.D. 43, the Romans and Britons were again contending with each other, for in that year Plautius was sent by the emperor Claudius, with forces from Gaul, to subdue the inhabitants of this island.

5. Aulus Plautius was a general of approved wisdom and valour, who, after some little difficulty, landed in Britain with 50,000 men. No native Britons, armed with clubs and supported by war chariots, opposed the landing of Plautius, as they had previously done that of Cæsar; yet they were doubtless as well informed of the intended expedition as their forefathers had been of Cæsar's. How was this? Did not the remembrance of the empty threats of Augustus and Tiberius, and the mock triumph of Caligula, induce the unwary Britons to believe that the expedition of Claudius would never leave the Gaulish shore? Possibly this was the case: certain it is that they were unprepared to meet Plautius, who marched into the interior of the country, and defeated them in numerous engagements. The emperor Claudius himself at length appeared on the island—pursued the war with equal energy and success, as his lieutenant had done during the short period he remained here, returning in triumph to Rome in less than six months after he had left it. Plautius was appointed governor of the

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<sup>1</sup> Cæsar, lib. 5, c. 8, 12, 15, 23.



island, (the district south of the Thames now being in the Roman possession), assisted by the celebrated Vespasian. After a short but successful administration, he was recalled in the year A.D. 47, and Ostorius Scapula appointed as his successor.

Ostorius Scapula found the affairs of Britain in the utmost disorder upon his arrival. Winter had set in, and the restless Britons little dreamt that the new Roman general would molest them at this season of the year. In this, however, they were mistaken. Ostorius lost no time in pursuing those patriots who had united in common defence of their fatherland, and, in order to cripple them as much as possible, determined to deprive the suspected of arms. One tribe, the Iceni,<sup>2</sup> for a time thwarted his designs, for, collecting neighbouring forces, they determined to give battle to him. As might have been expected, victory declared in favour of the Romans. Ostorius then marched against some Cangians,<sup>3</sup> devastating their territories; thence returning against the Brigantes,<sup>4</sup> silenced them, and prepared to visit the Silures,<sup>5</sup> who had been his most resolute opponents. The celebrated Caractacus headed the Silures. He unwisely determined to hazard a battle with the enemy, forgetting that the true policy of his warfare was to avoid a general engagement—to have been content to harass the enemy in their line of march through the country, and to have taken advantage of any rash step made by them. Caractacus selected a most advantageous position for the concentration of his forces, viz., an elevated spot of ground in Shropshire, in front of a river. Its banks, and the sides of the hill, were well fortified. He and his chieftains did all that barbarian valour and policy would dictate. He animated his men by reminding them that that day was to secure their permanent freedom or involve them in interminable bondage, referring them to the deeds of their ancestors who had repulsed the great Cæsar, secured to themselves freedom from “Roman axes” and “Roman tribute,” and preserved their wives and children from contamination. But it was in vain. We are

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1 Tacitus, *Life of Agricola*, c. 13. Henry's *Hist. Eng.*, book i, c. 1.

2 Inhabitants of Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridge, and Huntingdon.

3 Supposed to have been the shepherds of the different tribes.

4 Inhabitants of Yorkshire and Lancashire.

5 A people of South Wales.

told that "their display of courage and alacrity amazed the Roman general: besides, the river to be passed, the rampart they had raised, the frowning ridges of the mountains, every part exhibiting symptoms of fierce determination, and every post well manned,—all these things alarmed him."<sup>1</sup> But neither the natural difficulties of the mountain, the fortifications of the Britons, nor the courage with which they fought, could secure them from defeat. The fortifications were destroyed, and the Britons compelled to seek refuge in flight. Caractacus himself did not long escape. He claimed the protection of his step-mother, the queen of the Brigantes, who treacherously delivered him up to the Romans.<sup>2</sup>

6. The noble character of Caractacus was as ably sustained by him in captivity as it had been whilst contending with the legions of Rome for the independence of his country. His fame had reached the ears of the luxurious inhabitants of the capitol, and their curiosity to behold him had been so highly excited, that the approaching scene of his degradation and the Roman general's triumph was anticipated with marked anxiety. And scarcely ever did the streets of Rome present a more animated aspect than upon this occasion. "First the servants and followers of the British king moved in procession; and the trappings and collars, and all that he had taken in wars with his neighbours, were borne along; next came his brothers, his wife, and daughter; and last himself, attracting the gaze of all."<sup>3</sup> With trembling footsteps did the attendant Britons move mechanically through the noble city. Caractacus alone stood firm. "How," thought he, "could a people possessed of so much magnificence at home envy me a humble cottage in Britain?" He was a stranger to the ambitious policy of Rome; but he quailed not before the emperor's glance, nor stood daunted before the assembled multitudes. And his intrepidity of character secured his freedom. Before the imperial tribunal he is thus said to have delivered himself: "If my moderation in prosperity had been as great as my lineage was noble and my successes brilliant, I should have entered this city as a friend, rather than as a captive; nor

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1 Tacitus, vol. i, p. 291.

2 Tacitus, *Annals*, lib. 12, c. 31-36.

3 Tacitus, *Annals*, lib. 12, c. 36.



would you then have disdained to receive a prince descended from illustrious ancestors, and the ruler of many nations, into terms of alliance. My present lot, as it is to me ignominious and degrading, so is it a matter of glory and triumph to you. I had men and arms, horses and riches: where is the wonder if I was unwilling to part with them? If you, Romans, aim at extending your dominion over all mankind, it does not follow that all men should take the yoke upon them. Had I at once been delivered into your hands a prisoner at discretion, neither had my fall nor your glory been thus signal. If you inflict punishment upon me, the affair will sink into oblivion; but if you preserve my life I shall form an imperishable record of your clemency."<sup>1</sup>

7. The honour gained by Ostorius, through the capture of Caractacus, was not of a permanent character. The Britons, fired with rage at the loss of their chief, and dreading the encroachments of the Romans, made a most determined stand, and victory thus not unfrequently followed their standards. Ostorius suffered much from their steady determination, and at length, worn out with cares, expired, to their great exultation.<sup>2</sup>

8. Aulus Didius succeeded Ostorius. One of the Roman legions had been defeated ere Didius reached the island. The disasters attending this defeat were magnified by Didius, evidently that he might increase the amount of credit due to himself if he subdued the rebellion, and which might prove an excuse for him should he be unfortunate in his military engagements. He appears, however, to have prosecuted the war with vigour, and to have subdued the Silures, his most bitter opponents.<sup>3</sup> He was succeeded by Veranius, of whom little can be said, save that he made some incursions into the territories of the Silures.<sup>4</sup>

9. Veranius was succeeded by Suetonius. He was one of those daring Romans that intensified the terror of the Roman arms. Not satisfied with the common-place manœuvres of ordinary generalship, he desired to strike

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<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, lib. 12, c. 37. (I have used throughout this work Bohn's edition of the classics and old chronicles.)

<sup>2</sup> Tacitus. The Roman dominion in Britain was extended under Ostorius to the Severn and Trent.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, lib. 14, c. 29.

some terrible blow which might rival the glories of Scipio or Cæsar. The Isle of Anglesea was at this period the home of the Druids—the focus of each rebellion. Thither he directed the march of the legions. Flat-bottomed boats were constructed by him to cross the straits which separate the island from the mainland, and every other suitable preparation was made to destroy the stronghold of the Britons. And it required all the determination of such a general for such an undertaking. Desperation had seized the minds of the Druids. Death or victory was the only alternative they proposed to themselves. The glowing account of their conduct as related by Tacitus cannot be omitted. “On the shore stood the forces of the enemy, a dense array of arms and men, with women dashing through the ranks like furies; their dress funereal, their hair dishevelled, and carrying torches in their hands. The Druids, around the host, pouring forth dire imprecations, with their hands uplifted towards the heavens, struck terror into the soldiers by the strangeness of the sight; insomuch that, as if their limbs were paralysed, they exposed their bodies to the weapons of the enemy without an effort to move.”<sup>1</sup> They were attacked and defeated, their fortifications demolished, and their bodies consumed in the fires they had prepared for their enemies.

10. Whilst Suetonius was exulting in the success of his arms in this direction, news arrived of the revolt of the Iceni in his rear. Their queen, Boadicea, had been cruelly treated by the Romans, her daughters ravished, and the whole of her possessions seized, although her late husband had bequeathed one half to the Romans to secure their protection. Joined to the Iceni were the Trinobantes,<sup>2</sup> and other tribes who were determined to wreak their vengeance upon the Romans for their brutal conduct. And for a certain period success attended their arms. London and Verulam fell into their hands, and seventy thousands of the Romans and their allies were slain. Their successes, however, were but of transient duration. Suetonius pushed forward with the utmost vigour, and was at length in a condition to oppose them. The temerity of Boadicea in engaging the disciplined Roman army, numbering ten thousand men, met with the

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<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, lib. 14. c. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Inhabitants of Essex and Middlesex.

ill success which might have been expected. Eighty thousands of the Britons are said to have been slain, as no quarter appears to have been given.<sup>1</sup> The battle ended, and fresh forces having arrived from Germany, Suetonius prepared to follow up his victory. Fire and sword now devastated the homes of the Britons, and famine succeeding, they were in the most deplorable condition. A misunderstanding, however, having arisen between Suetonius and the Roman procurator, the former was at length recalled, and was succeeded by a series of governors whose names it will be sufficient merely to mention.

11. Petronius Turpilianus followed Suetonius, and then came in succession Trebellius Maximus, Vettius Bolanus, Petilius Cerealis, and Julius Frontinus. All these generals exerted their influence to subjugate the Britons, but in vain. Fierce contentions, and enduring struggles for supremacy, incessantly raged between the native Britons and their invaders during the whole of the period referred to above, and often did the result appear doubtful. The Iceni, the Brigantes, the Silures, were continually arising like reanimated dead bones. Filled with patriotic ardour, impelled by inherent valour, impatient of subjection, and the mortal enemies of their invaders, the Britons fought with undiminished vigour. Often did the disciplined veterans of the Roman army quail before the fierce onsets of the hardy Britons, and though military skill, indomitable perseverance, enduring bravery, and perfect discipline, were employed in subduing them, it is doubtful whether their complete subjugation would ever have been accomplished had not a more powerful force than mere coercion been brought against them. It required the soothing hand of friendship, not less than the strong arm of power, to overcome this high-spirited people.

12. Agricola<sup>2</sup> at length came, proffering himself the

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<sup>1</sup> Tacitus.

<sup>2</sup> Cneius Julius Agricola was the son of Julius Gracinus, a Roman senator, and a celebrated writer on agriculture. He was born at Forumjuli (Frejus) in the year A.D. 40. He was carefully educated by his mother, Julia Procilla, during his childhood, and was afterwards sent to Massilia (Marseilles) the principal seat of learning at Gaul, celebrated alike "for Grecian politeness" and provincial frugality. Having been at length appointed to a command in Britain, under Suetonius, he here learnt the rudiments of war. Upon his return to Rome, A.D. 62, he became officially engaged there, and soon afterwards married a lady of noble family. He at length became quæstor, under the pro-consulship of Salvius Titianus, in which office he displayed a most trustworthy character. During the latter part of Nero's reign he was



*friend* of this warlike people. Uplifting the sword with one hand he extended the olive branch with the other, and speedily announced to the Britons that whilst prepared to do battle with them he was the friend of peace. He arrived in England A.D. 78. That season of the year which the Roman armies were accustomed to employ in important expeditions had passed away when he assumed the command, and it was now the middle of summer. The troops were scattered throughout the country, prepared to settle down quietly in their winter quarters. The Britons had been active as usual. A tribe of them, the Ordovices,<sup>1</sup> had recently destroyed some Roman cavalry stationed near their territories. Agricola assembled what troops were at hand, called in the detachments from the legions, and with these, and a small body of auxiliaries, marched against those Britons and almost annihilated their tribe. He now turned his attention to the occupancy of Anglesea, which the untoward rebellion of Boadicea and the subsequent recall of Suetonius, had prevented that general from accomplishing. Although he had prepared no flat-bottomed boats to transport his soldiers across the straits as Suetonius had previously done, his daring intrepidity would not allow him to forego the opportunity of attempting the subjugation of the island. A select

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tribune and prætor, and was at length, as a reward for supporting Vespasian, entrusted with the command of the 20th legion, under Petilius Cerealis. Repairing to Britain, he there distinguished himself by consummate prudence no less than by distinguished courage; and upon his return to Rome was invested by Vespasian with the government of Aquitania. In A.D. 77 he was appointed consul, and upon the expiration of his consulship was entrusted with the government of Britain. He was recalled by the jealous Domitian, after spending six or seven summers in the island, for "doing," as Milton expresses it, "too much of what he was sent to do," (Hist. Brit. p. 64) and entered the city of Rome by night at the command of the tyrant emperor. He now retired into private life, and died in the year A.D. 93, not however, without a suspicion of having been poisoned. (Tacitus, Annals: Eng. Cyclope.) The exemplary conduct of the Roman mothers with regard to their children, as portrayed by Tacitus, (Dialogue concerning oratory, c. 23) deserves the serious study of mothers of the present day. "The infant as soon as born was not consigned to the mean dwelling of a hireling nurse, but was reared and cherished in the bosom of its mother, whose highest praise it was to take care of her household affairs and attend to her children. It was customary likewise for each family to choose some elderly female relation of approved conduct to whose charge the children were committed: in her presence not one indecent word was uttered, nothing was done against propriety and good manners. The hours of study and serious employments were settled by her directions, and not only so, but even the diversions of the children were conducted with modest reserve and sanctity of manners. Thus, it was stated that Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, superintended the education of her illustrious issue: it was thus that Aurelia trained up Julius Cæsar, and thus Alia formed the mind of Augustus."

<sup>1</sup> Inhabitants of North Wales.

body of his auxiliaries, probably Batavians, were ordered to cross the channel with their horses and arms, which so disconcerted the inhabitants that they yielded without a struggle.

13. Thus ended his first campaign. These undertakings accomplished, Agricola employed the winter months in ameliorating the condition of the Britons. He began by the reformation of his own household. Merit became the only passport to advancement. Personal knowledge of the circumstances surrounding him was his desire. Punishments were wisely administered, and pardons judiciously granted. He did not remit taxation, but he made it just and equal.<sup>1</sup> By these and similar measures he endeared himself to the Britons, who acknowledged his supremacy; whilst he struck terror into the counsels of those who were opposed to him by his incessant activity and daring intrepidity. His first campaign, and his first wintering in Britain, were true prototypes of the six succeeding ones. Active operations were commenced by him each season as soon as the weather permitted, and his campaigns extended the Roman influence to the northern extremity of the island. His fleets determined the geographical fact that Great Britain was an island, and that the Orkneys were situated at the north of it. By his bravery and skill he defeated Galgacus on the Grampian hills. His prudence led to the erection of a chain of forts from the Frith of Clyde to the Frith of Forth, to keep in check the northern inhabitants of the island. By his wise regulations he taught the Britons the arts of civilized life, and caused their chief families to be instructed in the Roman language and literature. His generosity is perceptible in his rendering to all their more than due, and not arrogating to himself the merit of victories which often justly belonged to him. Although his character is drawn by his son-in-law, yet that son-in-law is the great, the eloquent Tacitus, who, however, never wilfully sacrificed truth to eloquence—who can never be accused of depicting the merits of a Roman citizen to the detraction of the character of a British barbarian, but, on the contrary, seems to have delighted in putting

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<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Life of Agricola*, c. 18, 19.



into British mouths the sentiments of true bravery and praiseworthy independence.

14. Agricola was recalled A.D. 85, by the jealous Domitian, and we have now to pass over a period of nearly forty years ere we arrive at any information worth remembering in the history of Britain. In the year 121, however, the emperor Hadrian arrived here, corrected many abuses, and erected a rampart of earth from the river Tyne to Solway Firth, to restrain the incursions of his Caledonian enemies. In the year 138, Lollius Urbicus was governor of Britain. He raised a rampart of earth on the site of Agricola's chain of forts. In the year 207 we find the emperor Severus in Britain. Having struck terror into the Caledonians, and subsequently made peace with them, he employed himself in constructing a strong wall in the same direction as Hadrian's rampart of earth. The old emperor, after this undertaking, was taken ill and expired at York. In the year 284 we find Carausius assuming the purple, and, being supported by the Britons, the emperor Maximianus deemed it advisable to consent to his usurpation, inasmuch as he was unable to contend with him, and granted to him in consequence the government of Britain. Carausius was murdered in the year 293, in the prospect of an invasion of Constantius Cæsar, and Alectus, his chief officer, succeeding him, was defeated and slain by Asclepiodotus, an officer of Constantius, A.D. 296. Constantius at length became one of the emperors, and Britain fell under his share of government. He subdued the Caledonians, but we have no particulars of his actions. Constantine the Great, son of Constantius, was in Britain warring against the Mætæ and Caledonians, when his father died, and he was immediately declared emperor. Having finished the war with the Caledonians, he departed with many of the Britons who voluntarily followed his standard. Constans, son and successor of Constantine, visited Britain to chastise the Caledonians (now called the Picts and Scots); but we know nothing certain of the progress he made here. In the year 360, Lupicinus was sent here by Julian the Apostate to repel the Picts and Scots, who had made incursions into the British territories. He proceeded no farther than London, settled some affairs, and again left the island. After several attempts to subdue

the Picts and Scots, who were continually invading and plundering the country, the emperor Valentinian sent over the celebrated Theodosius, who, acting with great vigour, speedily checked the northern invaders, who had penetrated as far as London. He drove them back beyond the wall of Lollius Urbicus, restored order, improved the condition of the people, and did all that a wise and prudent general and a politic governor could do for their benefit. Recalled to undertake the duties of a higher office, he left with the tears and regret of all.

15. The vigour of the government of Theodosius had a most salutary effect upon the minds of the Picts and Scots, evincing what might be done in the most dire extremities by the energy of a master mind. Britain enjoyed tranquillity for some time after the period of his departure. At length, in the year 381, Maximus, an officer of great reputation, having been slighted as he conceived by the then reigning emperors of Rome, assumed the purple in Britain, enlisted a great number of British youths, and departed for the continent to struggle for the empire of the world with the reigning emperors. Fortunate at the commencement of his invasion in compassing the death of the emperor Gratian, his career was suddenly checked by Valentinian, Gratian's brother, and partner in the empire, assisted by Theodosius the emperor of the east. At length taken prisoner he was put to death by the command of Theodosius, when his British followers retired to Armorica, and being received by the Belgæ in a friendly manner settled there, and never returned to Britain again.

16. The small number of Roman soldiers permitted to remain in Britain, and the large number of Britons drawn off to the continent, encouraged the Picts and Scots to renew their depredations with increased energy. To uphold the sinking fortunes of this distant province, Theodosius, the then emperor of Rome, despatched Chrysantus, an officer of great importance, to superintend affairs here. He was completely successful, efficiently checking the incursions of the northern invaders. But the death of Theodosius offered a favourable opportunity for the enemies of the Roman empire to renew their attacks. The Picts and Scots again invaded the kingdom, whilst a reinforcement of Roman

soldiers sent here was speedily withdrawn to resist the attacks of the Goths, Vandals, and other northern barbarians, who were marching upon Rome itself. The remaining Roman soldiers in Britain forgot their allegiance to their emperor, and raised three successive members of their own body to supreme authority. Marcus and Gratian, the first two of these, were speedily murdered, whilst Constantine, the third elected, visited Gaul, carrying with him such British forces as he could obtain to struggle for the empire. At length he was defeated and slain, and his followers dispersed. His British auxiliaries joined their countrymen in Brittany, where they were favourably received, and remained permanently attached to their adopted country.

17. The period at length arrived when the luxury of the capitol had so enervated its citizens that they were no longer able to retain their supremacy over those distant colonies of the empire which required the smallest amount of military force. The salient parts of the Roman empire were simultaneously attacked by hordes of barbarians, possessed of the greatest avidity for plunder, and an energy as unsubdued by the refinement of civilized life as by the tyranny of despotism—a people whom defeats only exasperated to revenge without destroying their brute ferocity. Britain, attacked by barbarians from the north, and pirates from the east; robbed of its natural defenders by the levies of the Romans, or by voluntary emigration; the remainder of whose people was steeped in the inebriating vices of their conquerors, could only remain in its present relationship to Rome by the presence of Roman legions, and when these were denied was obliged to succumb to a power it could but fruitlessly oppose. The Roman emperor, Honorius, finding it impossible to retain soldiers in a distant colony which were required for home service, withdrew his forces from Britain, and the Britons became again independent about the year 409. “This year the Goths took the city of Rome by storm, and after this the Romans never ruled in Britain.”<sup>1</sup> True they occasionally sent over a legion to the assistance of their former subjects—true this seasonable assistance procured

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1 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub. an. 409.



temporary success; but very soon this slender aid was denied, and the Britons were left alone to defend their country as they best might.

18. The Roman domination in England was productive of immediate blessings, though not unmixed with the seeds of ultimate evils. The savage manners of the inhabitants, their degrading superstitions, and their tyrannical religion had been banished, and many of the seeds of civilization implanted; but the inhabitants had become weakened in numbers by the incessant drain of youths to supply the chasms in the Roman army—enfeebled by the luxuries introduced amongst them by their Roman masters—and their independence subdued by their subservience to their conquerors. From being accustomed to place their dependence upon the Romans in times of difficulty, they became divested of the energy necessary to maintain their freedom when left to themselves. From the indolence of the Romanized and luxurious, and the divisions of the ambitious, they were unable to act in unity, and thus became the easy prey of the first daring adventurers.



## CHAPTER III.

## HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN BRITAIN DURING THE ROMAN PERIOD.

Having briefly described the character of the learning of the ancient Britons before the Roman invasion, in the first chapter—having shown that the Druids were the sole instructors of the young—having succinctly related what history informs us of their learning, I propose now to pursue the subject. Ordinarily we expect to discover no definite boundary line in a nation's intellectual development. Silently the waves of progress move onward, indistinct at the time, and leaving only some general mark behind them. It is only when some great revolution in society takes place that retrogression or progress may be distinctly traced. The invasion of the Romans was of this nature. Under its influence the half naked Briton lost his savage appearance,—the skin was exchanged for the toga, the mud hut for the house of comfort and convenience, and amongst the higher classes at least the mere produce of the chase for the luxury of the capitol. Nor was the change in intellectual pursuits less marked, as we shall presently see.

2. From the time of Cæsar to that of Agricola Roman generals had visited this island, but it was with the view of crushing the independence of the Britons by brute force. Most of them were probably too ignorant of human nature to suppose that the minds of these wild specimens of nature might be powerfully influenced by the voice of reason or their affections secured by actions of love. It was only when Agricola arrived here that the Britons were led to perceive that the invaders were generous if ambitious,—that if they desired renown by the acquisition of another island, and expected tribute from a conquered people, they were

prepared to make some return for their unjustifiable aggressions. It was Agricola who shewed them the spark of Roman benevolence. And though patriotism remained unsubdued in the breasts of many, though the love of liberty filled the spirits of all,—yet there were those who very soon perceived the uselessness of the struggle of barbarism against civilization. There were those who were not insensible to acts of kindness, of flattery, and of elevation, and who consequently listened approvingly to the promises of the Roman commander.

3. After the decline of the Druidical power in Britain the work of education may be considered to have recommenced with the administration of Agricola. During the first winter of his abode in this island he devoted a large portion of his time to the work of reformation. Preparatory to other schemes of great import which he meditated, he reformed his own household, as has been before remarked, and rendered merit the only passport to advancement. The second winter witnessed a change in the appearance of British towns and British subjects. Temples, courts of justice, and dwelling houses were erected in accordance with Roman notions. Roman dresses were also worn, and a Roman education provided for those who were deemed qualified for such an indulgence. This, however, it must be borne in mind, was the right of princes. The sons of their chiefs were afforded the means of study, and their remarkable quickness secured for them the good opinion of their instructors, who favourably contrasted their intellectual capabilities with those of the Gaulish nobility.<sup>1</sup> “The sons of their chiefs,” says Whittaker, “were now taught to expand their views beyond the circle of a hunting life and the details of a traditionary history, and to enlarge their minds with acquisitions of knowledge. Their connection with the Romans put into their hands the great volume of literature, the history of men and the assemblage of the sciences, and they determined to read it. The difficulties of the Roman language gradually sunk before them, and the unknown worlds of science lay open to their view. They entered, seized the literary treasures of antiquity, and, for the first

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<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Life of Agricola*, c. 20, 21.

time, introduced them into the regions of the north. Nor did they rest here. The luxury of study, and the pride of intellect, soon led the new votaries of learning from the useful and instructive to the ornamental and pleasing branches of literature. They invaded the fairy regions of classical taste, they studied the purity of the Roman language, and they cultivated the graces of the Roman composition."<sup>1</sup>

4. To ascertain the amount of instruction communicated to the Britons it will be necessary for us briefly to review the character of continental learning at this period. During the first century the Greeks held the foremost place among the nations of the earth for literary acquirements. Here were the most eminent of rhetoricians, here the philosophers who taught the doctrines of Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, and Epicureus.<sup>2</sup> In Rome learning was appreciated. The higher classes were there instructed in the Greek language and eloquence. Thence they proceeded to the study of philosophy and law, and finally travelled to Greece to complete their education.<sup>3</sup> The colony at Marseilles, which had so early obtained a reputation for its interest in the cause of learning, still maintained it.<sup>4</sup> In the early part of the second century literature flourished at Rome, but declined during the reigns of the successors of Trojan. The learning of the Roman youths was very superficial.<sup>5</sup> During this century Rome witnessed the erection of a public school at the direction of the emperor Adrian, where the sciences were taught; whilst Berytus, in Phoenicia, was founded for the study of the law.<sup>6</sup> The irruption of barbarians in the third century prevented the reigning emperors from paying that attention to education which they otherwise might have done, and learning consequently decayed. The short reigns of the emperors were highly unfavourable to learning—their violent deaths rendered their successors more attentive in providing means for their own safety than for the improvement of the people. No less than twenty-three emperors reigned (either separately, occasionally, or two conjointly) during this period,

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<sup>1</sup> Hist. Manchester, b. i, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> Mosheim Eccles. Hist., vol. i, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 166.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



many of them being by education and inclination averse to the cultivation of the mental powers of the people. Similar causes similarly retarded mental improvement during the fourth century, yet we are told that philosophy, eloquence, poetry, and history, were studied by both Greeks and Latins during this period.<sup>1</sup> Now some, if not all, of these branches of study must have been communicated to the Britons by their Roman teachers, but unfortunately we have no means of ascertaining the particular subjects. That they paid great attention to the study of rhetoric we can hardly doubt, when we consider the importance attached to the "art of speaking with propriety" by the Romans;<sup>2</sup> and when we are distinctly informed by Tacitus that the Britons in the time of Agricola were desirous of becoming eloquent.<sup>3</sup> Civil law must also have claimed a large share of their attention, for we find that Britons were sent to Gaul to receive instruction in this subject.<sup>4</sup> If we could believe the authority of the British historian, Gildas, we should assert that the Roman language was at length generally understood in the island. This, however, appears to be impossible, and we rather agree with the observation of Lord Macaulay, "It is not probable that the islanders were at any time generally familiar with the tongue of their Italian rulers."<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, we must be cautious in receiving the opinion even of so eminent a man as Lord Macaulay, when that opinion is unsupported by facts, and when, moreover, an opposite assertion is made by a respectable ancient historian. Our wisest course is, perhaps, a medium one. The assertion of Gildas is doubtless an exaggerated statement; but so are many others, made not only by himself but by other historians also, which we do not altogether reject. Stripped of its colouring there may be truth even in a fable. Lord Macaulay probably meant nothing more than that the masses of the people were not Latinized in speech—that those who studied the Roman language were few in comparison with the population. That the masses were acquainted with the

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1 Mosheim *Eccles. Hist.*, vol. i, p. 257, et passim.

2 See the works of Cicero, Quinctilian, Tacitus.

3 *Life of Agricola*, c. 21.

4 Juvenal, *Satire* 15.

5 Macaulay's *Hist. Eng.*, vol. 1, c. 1.



Latin language, we, who know anything of the difficulty of its mastery, shall reject as impossible; for although it may have been easier to acquire a knowledge of the language when a living one, yet its difficulties must have been, even then, such as years of study could alone have surmounted. The truth doubtless is that all those children whose parents were in a position to secure for them an education learnt the Latin tongue. That the number thus engaged was continually increasing; that at length, in the abstract, there were very many classical scholars; whilst considered relatively to the masses of the population they were very few. And the same remarks are equally applicable to the other branches of instruction; for those who studied Latin had equal opportunities for attaining a knowledge in the other subjects of study then taught.

5. The real work of education amongst the Britons was commenced by Agricola, yet that education was, as we have seen, confined to the higher classes.<sup>1</sup> Whilst the *few* were instructed the *many* were, according to the Roman system, drawn off from the island to fight their conquerors' battles. The higher classes, taught by their instructors not only the virtues of civilized life, but also its vices, drank deeply of the cup of luxury, and were rendered so effeminate that when the period arrived for their emancipation from Roman bondage, and the power to assert their independence lay within their grasp, we perceive them too weak and disunited to secure the prize of liberty.<sup>2</sup> Learning, though it might have refined their taste, lost its potency from having been overwhelmed by vicious indulgences. This learning, moreover, must have been partial, for Britain, as Lord Macaulay eloquently remarks, "received only a faint tincture of Roman arts and letters."<sup>3</sup>

6. The introduction of christianity into Britain,—by

1 Martial intimates that the ancient Britons read the Roman poets.

2 "For stories teach us, that liberty sought out of season, in a corrupt and degenerate age, brought Rome itself to a further slavery; for liberty hath a sharp and double edge, fit only to be handled by just and virtuous men; to the bad and dissolute it becomes a mischief unwieldy in their own hands: neither is it completely given but by them who have the happy skill to know what is grievance and unjust to a people, and know how to remove it wisely; what good laws are wanting, and how to frame them substantially, that good men may enjoy the freedom which they merit, and the bad feel the curb which they need."—MILTON'S HISTORY OF GREAT BRITAIN, lib. iii, p. 88.

3 Macaulay, vol. i, p. 4.

whom, however, is uncertain,<sup>1</sup>—must have been a stimulus to education. That christianity made rapid progress in the island, and that some of the native Britons early distinguished themselves, we may gather from the fact that not only were three British bishops, a priest, and a deacon present at the Council of Arles, assembled in the year A.D. 314,<sup>2</sup> but also took part in the controversy, and in some measure combated the Roman views.

7. It was the policy of the Romans to establish schools in their conquered provinces, and Britain was not an exception to the general rule. Unfortunately for us we have no particular account of the seminaries of learning established here, though other countries are more fortunate. Certain we may be of one thing, that most of the celebrated towns of that period had schools. Dr. Henry enumerates Lincoln, York, Chester, Caerleon, and London, as towns which probably enjoyed the privilege: but this is a mere conjecture. We must be content to believe that there were such institutions in the island. They doubtless flourished whilst the Roman authority remained dominant. They declined and were destroyed by the Picts and Scots when the Roman patronage ceased to exist, or by the Saxon conquerors. At the commencement of the fifth century schools were established in Britain through the influence of a foreign prelate. Germanus, bishop of Auxerre, who came over to suppress the Pelagian heresy, founded several schools in Britain. Amongst them were the schools of Hensland (or Henllan), and Mockrost (or Mockross), placed under the superintendence of Dubricius, bishop of London, who often had, we are told, as many as a thousand scholars, collected from every part of the island. There was the school of Llantwit, taught by Iltutus,<sup>3</sup> amongst the number of whose pupils were the celebrated Gildas, and Daniel, who became bishop of Bangor. Paulinus presided over a school at Whiteland, in Caermarthenshire, one of whose scholars, for

<sup>1</sup> Rapier asserts with much plausibility that christianity was introduced into Britain by the soldiers of the Roman army, between the invasion of Claudius and the defeat of Boadicea. *Hist. Eng.*, vol. i, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Craik, *Henry's Hist. Eng.*, lib. i, c. 2, sec. 2. On the authority of Spelman British bishops were also present at the Council of Sardica, 347, and Romani, 349. *Kemble's Saxons in England*, vol. ii, p. 355.

<sup>3</sup> Rapier's *Hist. Eng.*, vol. i, p. 43. *Henry's Hist. Eng.*, vol. vi, p. 38.

a period of ten years, was St. David, the patron saint of Wales. There was also the school of Lancarvan, and the monastery of Bangor previously established, where British youths were educated. Yet ignorance was the rule in Britain, learning the exception, during this dark period.<sup>1</sup>

8. We must now briefly direct our attention to the poetry of the ancient Britons.<sup>2</sup> In studying the early history of a nation's literature our minds are naturally directed towards their poetical compositions. The effusions of poesy are more truly in unison with an infantile state of the mind than prosy dissertations. The child is attracted by the measured strains of versification—if he cannot fully understand he can admire. And the childhood of a nation is aptly represented by the infantile state of an individual. He directs his attention almost exclusively to the objects which surround him. With foreign subjects and abstract ideas he can have no concern. The similarity in manners and customs, and strains of thought of a pristine people is perceptible in the most distantly located states. Diversity is only seen in the different objects which attract the attention and educe diversified ideas. The general character of the North American Indian, the Polynesian, the ancient Briton, the Saxon, and the early Greek, is precisely similar. And indeed how could it be otherwise? They all belong to the same parent stem. All have similarly constituted minds, all are mortal,—their characters only become peculiar through peculiar associations.

9. Leaving these general reflections, let us approach our immediate business—the consideration of the poetry of the

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## LORD'S PRAYER IN ANCIENT BRITISH.

Eyen Taad, rhuvn wytyn y neofoedodd;  
 Santeiddier yr hemvu taw  
 De vedy dyrnas daw  
 Gweler dy wollys arryddayar megis agyn y nefi  
 Eyn bara beunydda vul dyro inniheddivu  
 Ammoddew ynny eyn deledion megis agi maddwu in deledwir minaw  
 Agna thowys ni in brofedigaeth  
 Namyn gwaredni rhag drug. Coote's Hist. Eng., vol. i, p. 487.

2 "Their (the Muses') lays have always been found to be most captivating and most exciting to the young minds. They are the most comprehensive form of lettered intellect; and being, in their rudest state, the effusions of the feelings of the day, they excite congenial feelings in those who hear and read them. Poetry is sympathy addressing sympathy; and if its subjects were but worthy of its excellences, it would lead the human mind to every attainable perfection."—TURNER, Hist. A. S., vol. ii, p. 3.



ancient Britons. I have before alluded to the Druids as their directors. These, venerated by a people whom they held in bondage, were yet regarded only with awe, unmixed with one particle of affection. Different, however, was it with the bards. These were, indeed, a portion of that privileged class;<sup>1</sup> but as the distinctive office of the Druids was the priesthood, so was that of the bards versification. The Druids dealt in mysteries beyond the comprehension of the vulgar, the bards addressed themselves to the masses. They incited them to war by their affecting strains: they restrained their rage by the soothing power of verse when moderation was necessary. At this distance of time we regard the Druids with feelings akin to contempt, but our sympathies lead us to look upon the bards with a spirit of admiration and even love.

The bards have been divided into three classes, each of them strictly confining its attention to one particular class of subject. There were the *Fer-Laoi* or Hymnists; the *Senachies*, or poetical historians; the *Fer-Dan*, or eulogists of contemporary warriors.<sup>2</sup> Specimens of the compositions of the last of these classes only have reached us. And what is their character? We cannot indeed read them without sincerely regretting the irreparable loss of the others. We turn from the sickly compositions of many modern poetasters to the original ideas of the ancient bards with sincere delight. There is no artistic display in them it is true, but there we have the genuine feelings of the heart depicted. And yet there was art in their production. They were composed for the memory, not for the pen, and were consequently so arranged that one line was a natural sequel to the preceding. One line remembered, all must be. Like the propositions of Euclid, each line depending upon a preceding one. No forced imagery to detract the attention, no lengthened digression, no loquacity, no common-place verbiage—all natural, concise, and to the point. Such were the poems of those time-honoured men.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Strictly speaking, the Druids were divided into three classes: the Druids proper, who performed all the offices of the priesthood; the *Vates*, or sacred musicians; and the Bards, or secular poets. *Hist. Brit.*, lib. i, c. 2.

2 Macpherson's Introduction to the Ancient British Nation. p. 257.

3 Dr. Blair's Dissertation on Ossian's poems.



## CHAPTER IV.

## THE SAXON INVASION.

1. From the period of the departure of the Roman forces from this island to the arrival of the Saxons we have no reason to believe that the Britons advanced in intellectual attainments. The little republics which they formed were engaged in healing or fermenting internal dissensions, or in opposing the ruthless invaders of the north—the Picts and Scots, who, like locusts, were devouring their hard-earned fruits, and encroaching like foaming billows upon their territory. Little leisure, limited means, and still less inclination had a people in such a case for the encouragement of learning. In studying the early history of a people we invariably find their ministers of religion their intellectual instructors. Was this the case in Britain after the destruction of the Druids? Had the Druids any successors, promulgating a purer faith and engaged in the work of tuition? There undoubtedly had succeeded a christian church in Britain—still were there British priests and bishops, but the doctrines they taught had been engrafted on the expiring embers of Druidism,<sup>1</sup> affording them a transient gleam of returning life ere their vitality should disappear for ever.

2. The Britons had, moreover, been corrupted by the heresies of Arian and Pelagius, and much time which might have been usefully employed, was spent upon the defence of these doctrines. The British church, indeed, disconnected and ignorant, was in no position to stimulate the education of British youth, and the power to do so was soon transferred to other hands. In the year A.D. 449, the Saxons, invited by the disheartened Britons, made their appearance on the

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<sup>1</sup> Henry's Hist. Eng., vol. i, p. 181.

island<sup>1</sup> to assist the inhabitants in repelling the Picts and Scots, who had penetrated into the heart of the kingdom. "So much do men, through impatience, count ever that the heaviest, which they bear at present, and, to remove the evil which they suffer, care not though they act in such a manner as to pull on a greater; as if variety and change in evil also were acceptable. Or, whether it be that men, in the despair of better, imagine fondly a kind of refuge in a change from one misery to another."<sup>2</sup>

3. As the Britons belonged to the first great migration from the east, so did the Saxons form a portion of the second or Teutonic family. Originally settling in northern Germany,<sup>3</sup> they now extended their migrations and became the despoilers of the British Celts. Disinclined to cultivate the then unproductive soil they occupied on the continent, habituated to a nomadic life, and addicted to plunder, they became the terror of neighbouring tribes. The ocean was their peculiar element, and in their shallow barks they braved its tempestuous waves in search of booty from some unsuspecting and perhaps distant coast. The inhabitants of the villages they attacked fled at their approach, and ere a sufficient force could be collected to oppose them these pirates had decamped with the richest plunder they could find. This was the people that eventually became masters of Britain. These pirates were our ancestors. Our temperament, physiognomy, manners, customs, and institutions harmonize with the fact. The indomitable perseverance, untiring energy, and martial courage—the light hair, florid complexion and pale blue eye—the love of a seafaring life,

1 A. S. Chron., sub. an. 449.

2 Milton's Hist. of Great Britain, p. 98.

3 Craik. Palgrave maintains that they were emigrants from Friesland. Dr. Latham objects to the assertion that they came from Friesland. He observes: "Friesland, indeed, if we look to the present condition of the languages allied to the English, and spoken in Germany, gives us the nearest approximation to the mother-country of the mother-tongue of the English. Nevertheless it is not exactly from Friesland that the Anglo-Saxon was derived; so that Friesland is only an approximation." After a learned disquisition upon the real origin of our Saxon forefathers, he concludes that the original area of those Angles of Germany, who afterwards became the so-called Anglo-Saxons of Britain, "lay between Rendsburg and Hanover, between Verden and Luneberg, and between Bremenvorde and Celle." (Handbook of the English Language, p.p. 7, 96.) Rapin says that when the Britons sent for them they inhabited Westphalia, Saxony, east and west Friesland, Holland, and Zealand. (Vol. i, p. 26.)

lingering superstition, and peculiarity of food, still proclaim our Saxon descent.<sup>1</sup>

4. The Picts and Scots, excited by a savage thirst for plunder, inundated the northern provinces of Britain, as the Saxons afterwards did the southern. Like the Saxons too, they hastened home with their booty ere any powerful force could be collected to oppose them. We may judge of the ferocity of their enterprizes, and the extent of their mischief, by reflecting that from the days of Agricola to the time of the Saxon invasion the united forces of the British and Roman soldiers in Britain were sometimes insufficient to check them. Repeatedly were the Roman armies marched against these freebooters, yet successive Roman generals were unable to subdue them. More than one Roman emperor bent his steps towards their territory. More than one Roman army was checked by them. Walls and ramparts proved insufficient to ward off their attacks, and not long after the Romans left the island did they appear with vastly increased strength in the centre of the country. Whilst the Britons continued the Celts of the time of Cæsar they were enabled to oppose their ferocious attacks with like ferocity, but it now required the piratical rovers of unsubdued German territories to restrain this robber-race.

5. The Saxons, invited by the desponding Britons to their assistance, made their appearance upon the British shores, under their renowned leaders Hengist and Horsa, and soon dissipated the northern hordes of barbarians, slaying them in desperate encounters, or pursuing them towards their mountain fastnesses.<sup>2</sup>

6. The Saxons, in travelling through Britain in pursuit of the foe, perceived the fruitful nature of the country, and doubtless contrasted it with their own sterile homes and the abodes of their relatives on the continent. They could not but have compared their own dangerous and fatiguing course of life with the comparatively easy one of the Britons. They remembered that they were themselves adventurers in search of fortune; that the wealth of their parents was already bestowed upon elder branches of their families. They must have been fully cognisant of their superiority in the perils

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1 Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons, vol. vi, lib. i, c. 1. Palgrave.

2 A. S. Chron. Bede's Eccles. Hist.



of actual warfare to the Romanized Britons. They were well aware that hordes of their own race were at liberty on the continent to embark upon any expedition upon the first summons.<sup>1</sup> They must, indeed, have reflected that now was an opportunity presented to them to grasp a kingdom, and that that opportunity once lost might recur no more for ever. With the natural feelings of barbarians, perfectly unscrupulous as to the means of obtaining that which they desired, they resolved to remain firm in an island to which their good fortune had directed them. It was not, however, without many severe struggles that the permanent occupation of the country was effected.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand was arrayed a semi-barbarous people, whose innate courage, martial prowess, and impenetrable cunning had baffled the arms of the Romans for thirty years, and who were only finally subdued by acts of kindness blended with prudent firmness. Though in some measure degenerated from their savage ancestors in patriotic courage, their ancient and natural daring might be expected to revive in defence of their fatherland against their treacherous allies. On the other hand was a pristine race of hardy warriors, who spurned the idea of death and dreamt of nought but victory. Unaccustomed to defeat, anticipating unlimited support from their countrymen at home, and allying themselves to the Picts and Scots, their former enemies,<sup>3</sup> they formed an invincible host, and might confidently depend upon the subjugation of the Britons. Nor were they wrong in their expectations. The work was surely though slowly accomplished. Within the space of one hundred and eighty years from the arrival of Hengist and Horsa no fewer than six or seven<sup>4</sup> different expeditions had arrived in the island, and the Saxon dominion

1 Bede, *Hist. Eng.*, lib., c. 15.

2 Bede, lib. i, c. 16 and 20. The A. S. Chron. enumerates upwards of twenty battles between the Saxons and the British and Welsh.

3 Bede's *Eccles. Hist.*

4 Dr. Latham enumerates six different settlements of invaders from Germany. The first, A.D. 449, under Hengist and Horsa, calling themselves Jutes, and establishing the kingdom of Kent. The second, A.D. 477, under Ella, denominated Saxons, settling in Sussex (the south Saxons). The third, A.D. 495, under Cerdic, landing in Hampshire, and establishing the kingdom of the west Saxons (Wessex). The fourth, A.D. 530, when certain Saxons landed in Essex. [The first monarch was Erkenwin.] The fifth, Angles, settling in Norfolk and Suffolk during the reign of Cerdic. [The first king, Uffa, began to reign 575.] The sixth, A.D. 547, Angles, under Ida, settling in the south-western part of Scotland. [Mercia appears to have been founded by Creda, 585.]

was thus proudly established; the remnant of the Britons being driven into the mountain fastnesses of Wales and Cumberland, or the peninsula of Cornwall. It would be tedious and unprofitable, and, moreover, foreign to the nature of this work to relate in detail the history of the Saxons from their arrival in England to the reign of their first sole sovereign in Britain,—I shall therefore but briefly allude to it. Having conquered the country, they appropriated such inhabitants of the soil as had not fled to the mountainous region of the West to their own immediate use, and this remnant of the ancient Britons thus became the slaves of the barbarous Saxons. Yet for all this the tide of affairs did not run smoothly with them. They had unjustly acquired a territory, and the uplifted hand of justice frequently fell severely upon them. We cannot believe that their British slaves were the most tractable of beings; we know that more of their own countrymen arrived than were welcome, nor are we left in ignorance of the civil discord which sprung up amongst themselves; and all these things tended to rob them of peace. Now do we see one kingdom swallowed up by a more powerful neighbour; now one petty prince struggling for the Bretwaldaship<sup>1</sup> to gratify his overtowering ambition; now christianity revered, now despised; now civilization progressing and learning encouraged, and now by some sudden impulse as fearfully depressed. But the period at length arrived when the separate interests of chieftainship should be subjected to the control of one will,—when the evils of a heptarchy should be dismissed for the more permanent advantages of a central government,—when local rulers, who would not hear the voice of reason when urged in opposition to their own fancied interests, should be compelled to succumb to the strong arm of power.

#### EGBERT.

7. Egbert was descended from Cerdic, the founder of the kingdom of Wessex. Being a young man of aspiring character, he gave great uneasiness to Bertric (or Brithric) the reigning prince, who determined to destroy him. Ap-

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<sup>1</sup> One of the most powerful of the petty Saxon kings appears always to have held a kind of authority over the rest as lord paramount, and was styled Bretwalda.

prized of his danger, however, Egbert fled to Offa, king of Mercia, by whom he was generously received. Offa was offered money to give up the young prince, but Egbert had the good fortune to escape to France.<sup>1</sup>

8. At this time France was under the rule of the powerful Charlemagne, the greatest prince of his age. In his court was young Egbert's ambition stimulated, and his crude ideas moulded into a more definite shape. Here he doubtless determined to attempt those actions which afterwards advanced him to the sovereignty of the whole island. Upon the death of Bertric, who was poisoned by his wife, Egbert was invited to return to England, which invitation he accepted, and was crowned king of Wessex in the year A.D. 800.<sup>2</sup> Immediately upon his accession to the sovereignty of Wessex he commenced that series of military operations which has rendered his name so famous. After having subjugated the Britons of Cornwall, he turned his victorious arms against the Mercians. In the year 824 he fought the battle of Hellendun (Wilton) with Bernulf, king of the Mercians, and completely defeated him.<sup>3</sup> Kent, Surrey, the South Saxons and East Saxons, were next subjugated by him, Mercia rendered tributary, and Northumbria, despairing of success, yielded to his power.<sup>4</sup> Thus did he become at least the nominal master of the whole of England.

9. Egbert, though thus successful in subjugating his countrymen, was not permitted to enjoy the fruits of his labours in peace, for fresh enemies now made their appearance in the persons of the Danes. In the year 787 the Danes invaded Britain.<sup>5</sup> Being nearly related to the Saxons, some of them claiming descent from Woden, the acknowledged ancestor of Hengist, they belonged to the great Teutonic family. Having settled in Scandinavia, and rapidly increasing in numbers,<sup>6</sup> this comparatively inhospitable country speedily became too thickly peopled. Their laws of

1 W. of Malm. Chron., lib. ii, c. 1. The A. S. Chron. (836) says that Bertric assisted Offa in driving Egbert out of the kingdom, because he had married his daughter. W. of Malm. asserts that Offa was induced to assist Bertric, in opposition to Egbert, from flattering allurements, which allurements were the project of the marriage of his daughter with Bertric, and the bribe above referred to.

2 William of Malm., lib. ii, c. 1.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 A. S. Chron.

6 Worsaaes Danes, Intro. p. xvi.



hereditary succession, like the Saxon, left the younger sons generally unprovided for, and these were consequently compelled to seek their own fortune. Provided by their parents, perhaps, with small boats and the necessary accoutrements, they committed themselves to the mercy of the waves when they were unable to steer their course to some desired coast. They had been accustomed to mock the foaming billows from their infancy, and the seas had consequently little terror for them. Nay, the happiness which was promised to the shipwrecked by their degraded system of religion, induced them to court dangers which to other minds would have been most appalling. "The force of the storm," they would sing, "is a help to the arm of our rowers; the hurricane is in our service, it carries us the way we would go."<sup>1</sup>

10. In the Saxon Chronicle there appears the first entry respecting these Danes in the year 787, which has been translated as follows: "This year took Bertric king Offa's daughter Eadburghe to wife. And in his days first came three ships of northmen from Haeretha (heathen) land (Denmark). And the reeve (sheriff) thereto rode and them would drive to the king's town because he wist not what they were; and him there they slew." These were the first ships of Danish men that sought the English land. The invasions of the Danes continued throughout many successive reigns, until they at length became masters of the country, which, however, they held but a short period. Egbert defeated them in several battles, but they nevertheless periodically revisited the country. He died in the year 836.<sup>2</sup>

#### ETHELWULF.

11. Upon the death of Egbert, in the year 836 or 837, Ethelwulf, his son, succeeded him. Egbert had consolidated

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1 As quoted by Thierry, p. 21. (Whittaker's edition.) This was the people of whom Turner speaks (*Hist. Eng.*, vol. i, p. 29) and asserts that their criminals preferred death to blows, and made it their pride to die laughing. The whole nation abhorred tears and wailing, and never wept for a dying friend.

Haller says of them: "They feared no wounds and looked upon death as the passage to the palaces of the gods. They never considered the number of their enemies, and singly attacked whole armies. The gallant Ragnar sung his funeral hymn with gnawing snakes in his bosom."—Translated from the German of ALBERT VON HALLER by Francis Steinitz.

2 A. S. Chron., sub. an. 836.

a kingdom by skilful manœuvres and personal valour, yet left an ample field of glory for his son, though not without a presentiment that the abilities of that son were unequal to the task of seizing it.<sup>1</sup> The early inclinations of Ethelwulf most certainly warranted his father's unfavourable opinion of him, for we are informed that during Egbert's lifetime he was in clerical orders, having been ordained bishop of Winchester.<sup>2</sup> Although Roger of Wendover<sup>3</sup> is the only other ancient historian who mentions this circumstance, the story seems probable enough. William of Malmesbury, indeed, informs us that he preferred a life of peacefulness to the bustling excitement attendant upon kingly power.<sup>4</sup> And the easy manner in which he permitted his sons to rob him of his dominion, clearly evinces his unfitness for the government of such a kingdom as England in such times. Soon after his accession to the throne he appears to have willingly yielded up those provinces of England conquered by his father, Egbert, to his son Athelstan,<sup>5</sup> contenting himself with his paternal kingdom of Wessex.<sup>6</sup> Of this son's subsequent history very little is known. He appears to have been frequently engaged in contests with the Danes,—at one time defeating them in a naval battle hereafter to be more particularly mentioned. He appears to have died before his father, and the government with which he was invested returned into the hands of the king. It was fortunate for Ethelwulf that he had prudent and brave counsellors. Whilst Ealstan, bishop of Sherborne, developed the military resources of the country, and provided the exchequer with the means of defraying military expenses,<sup>7</sup> St. Swithin, of Winchester, attended to the spiritual instruction of the king. There was every need of bravery and prudence in those who held the reins of government at this period, for the Danes, who had first invaded

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1 W. of Malm., lib. ii, c. 1.

2 Henry of Huntington, lib. v. Capgrave says he was first a monk of Winchester.

3 Flowers of History, vol. i, p. 187.

4 W. of Malmesbury, vol. ii, c. 2.

5 A. S. Chron., Ethelward's Chron., W. of Malmesbury. Florence of Worcester, Roger of Wendover. — Roger de Hovedon, Huntingdon and Mailros, assert that Athelstan, king of Kent, Surrey, and the South Saxons, was the son of Egbert, Egbert dividing his kingdom between his two sons Ethelwulf and Athelstan. See TURNER, vol. i, p. 418.

6 W. of Malmesbury, lib. ii, c. 1.

7 W. of Malmesbury, lib. ii, c. 2.

England in the reign of Egbert, now renewed their attacks with redoubled fury. One band of these pirates was no sooner defeated, than a second made its appearance. In the words of an old historian, "It was wonderful how, when the English kings were hastening to encounter them in the eastern districts, before they could fall in with the enemy's bands, a hurried messenger would arrive and say, 'Sir king, whither are you marching? The heathens have disembarked from a countless fleet on the southern coast, and are ravaging the towns and villages, carrying fire and slaughter into every quarter.' The same day another messenger would come running, and say, 'Sir king, whither are you retreating? A formidable army has landed in the west of England, and if you do not quickly turn your face toward them, they will think you are fleeing, and follow in your rear with fire and sword.' Again, the same day, or on the morrow, another messenger would arrive, saying, 'What place, O noble chief, are you making for? The Danes have made a descent in the north, already they have burnt your mansions, even now they are sweeping away your goods; they are tossing your young children, raised on the points of their spears; your wives, some they have forcibly dishonoured, others they have carried off with them.' Bewildered by such various tidings of bitter woe, both kings and people lost their vigour, both of mind and body, and were utterly prostrated; so that even when they defeated the enemy, victory was not attended with its wonted triumphs, and supplied no confidence for the future."<sup>1</sup> Considering the unsettled state of England at the time, and the weak character of the monarch, we are not surprised that the Danes were frequently victorious; our only wonder is how the Saxons resisted the attacks of their numerous and barbarian enemies so firmly, and gained so many battles.

12. Of all the successes of the Saxons at this period, two victories claim our special attention; the first, in consequence of the magnitude of the slaughter of the Danes in a great battle; and the second, rendered remarkable by the defeat of these pirates upon their own element—the sea. The first victory here alluded to was obtained at Ockley, in Surrey,

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<sup>1</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, preface to book v.



in the sixteenth year of the reign of Ethelwulf. The Danes had landed from two hundred and fifty ships at the mouth of the Thames. Proceeding to London, they stormed that city, and afterwards routed the forces of the Mercian king. Advancing to Ockley, they were there met by the royal forces, and a battle ensuing, "the warriors fell on both sides like corn in harvest," and the bodies and limbs of the slain were swept along by rivers of blood.<sup>1</sup> This sanguinary battle resulted in a decided victory of the Saxons. The same year, Athelstan, the Kentish king, with his alderman Ealhere, gained a naval victory over the Danes, taking nine of their ships and putting the remainder of the fleet to flight.<sup>2</sup>

13. In the year 853, Ethelwulf sent his son Alfred to Rome, whither he himself went in the following year. Previous to his departure, however, he granted by royal charter every tenth hide of land in his kingdom to the servants of Christ. Ethelwulf remained twelve months in Rome, and whilst there granted a household tax of one penny upon every dwelling in the kingdom to the Roman pontiff, which was afterwards denominated "Peter's pence." In returning to England, Ethelwulf visited France, where he married Judith, daughter of Charles, the Frankish king.<sup>3</sup>

14. Ethelwulf did not meet with so friendly a reception upon his return to England as he perhaps anticipated. His son Ethelbald, Ealstan, bishop of Sherborne, and Enulf, earl of Somerset, who had doubtless been invested with great power during his absence, now conspired against him and endeavoured to rob him of his kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Many reasons combined to produce this conspiracy. Ethelwulf was a weak prince, unfit for the government of the country; and this fact was well known to the bishop of Sherborne, who had so long directed the military affairs of the kingdom. Then, again, his marriage and treatment of Judith brought upon him many enemies. William of Malmsbury, indeed, does not scruple to assert that this was the cause of the hostility of his people; for Judith was held in the highest esteem by

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1 Henry of Huntingdon, lib. v. Roger de Hovedon's Annals, p. 36.

2 Ibid.

3 W. of Malms. Chron., lib. ii, c. 2. There is much difference of opinion, however, as to when the tax referred to was first granted.

4 Ibid.

the king, and permitted to sit on the throne next himself, contrary to the custom of the West Saxons.<sup>1</sup>

15. Since the death of Bertric, the predecessor of Egbert, —who, as has been remarked, was poisoned by his queen, Eadburga,—no honours had been permitted to the wife of a West Saxon monarch. Roger of Wendover, states that this conspiracy of Ethelwulf's subjects was in some measure brought about in consequence of the king's marriage with Judith, a Frankish princess, to the exclusion of a Saxon lady from this high dignity.<sup>2</sup> But according to the same authority, the chief cause of this plot was the crowning of young Alfred, by the pope, as the future sovereign of England<sup>3</sup>; which, if it really took place at the time, was a just cause of umbrage to his elder brothers. The result, however, of this conspiracy was a division of his paternal kingdom of Wessex between himself and his son Ethelbald, the latter acquiring the eastern and better part of the division, whilst Ethelwulf was obliged to remain content with the western and inferior portion.<sup>4</sup> From this arrangement it would appear that Athelstan, king of the South Saxons was still living; he must, however, have died soon after, for two years had but elapsed after the return of Ethelwulf when he (Ethelwulf) died, leaving to Ethelbald, his eldest son, the kingdom of Wessex, and to Ethelbert, his second son, the kingdom of Kent, Surrey, and the South Saxons previously held by Athelstan.<sup>5</sup>

#### ETHELBALD.

16. Ethelbald acquired the full sovereignty of Wessex in the year 857. His reign lasted but five years. It was a continual struggle with the Danes, who incessantly invaded the land. In the early part of his reign he was very unpopular with the people in consequence of his marriage with his step-mother Judith; but putting her away two years afterwards, and doing penance for his wickedness, he replaced himself in public estimation, so that at his death "all

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Flowers of History, p. 186.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> A. S. Chron.—H. of Huntingdon's Chron.

England lamented the royal youth, and mourned over him deeply, and they buried him at Sherborne, and the English people felt what they had lost in him.”<sup>1</sup>

#### ETHELBERT.

17. Ethelbert succeeded his brother in the year 862. During his reign the Danes landed at Southampton, and plundered the city of Winchester; but being met by the king's forces shortly afterwards were defeated. They then hastily embarked and betook themselves to the isle of Thanet, where a treaty of peace was made between them and the men of Kent. These pirates, by nightly excursions, broke the engagements of the treaty; upon which the Kentish men assembled and drove their enemies away. Ethelbert reigned, like his brother, for a period of five years only, when he was succeeded by his brother Ethelred. Ethelbert's loss was much regretted by his people, who honourably interred him at Sherborne by the side of his brothers.<sup>2</sup>

#### ETHELRED.

18. Ethelred ascended the throne in the year 867. Like the reigns of his brothers, Ethelred's was distinguished by the invasions of the Danes. Like the other sons of Ethelwulf, Ethelred possessed the daring necessary to stem the torrent of Danish invasion, if the qualities of one man, backed by the feeble efforts of a nation, could have obtained success. But this was not the case. The states which Egbert had subjugated had either shaken off the yoke of his successors, and were engaged in a civil contest for supreme power, or were intent upon doing so. Instead of a *united* people, standing forth to repel the invasions of their common home, one district was overrun before the inhabitants of a second could understand that their policy as well as duty should have sent them to the assistance of their neighbours. Thus has England been repeatedly conquered piecemeal. Notwithstanding the terrible invasions of the Danes a great

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<sup>1</sup> Henry of Huntingdon. See also W. of Malmesbury's Chron., Hovedon's Annals, and A. S. Chron.

<sup>2</sup> Asser's Life of Alfred.



portion of the histories of the times is taken up with a relation of the petty affairs of the several distracted states into which England was then divided.<sup>2</sup>

19. Ethelbert's whole time was occupied in strengthening the defences of his kingdom, and in fighting battles with the Danes. In his efforts he was assisted by his brother Alfred, who was thus trained for the important part he was destined to play in the history of his country. Ethelred is said to have personally engaged in conflicts with the Danes no less than nine times in one year—sometimes victorious, at others compelled to submit to defeat.<sup>1</sup>

20. The most celebrated battle that took place during the two last reigns was fought at Eschendun (Aston, in Berks, or Ashendon, in Bucks). The Saxon army engaged in two divisions under Ethelred and his brother Alfred. Ethelred was to attack the men under the Danish kings, and Alfred the men under the earls. Ethelred was engaged in pious devotion before encountering his enemies in the battle, and although informed by Alfred that the pagans were gaining ground, could not be prevailed upon to move to his support until his religious exercises were over; these ended, falling upon the Danes, he routed them with great slaughter, notwithstanding that they had the advantage of selecting the best position for the battle.<sup>3</sup> After a life of constant fighting with enemies from abroad, and racked with anxiety on account of the miserable condition of his people at home, Ethelred expired in the year 872.<sup>4</sup>

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1 W. of Malms. Chron.

2 Ibid., A. S. Chron., and Hovendon's Annals.

3 Asser's Life of Alfred.

4 W. of Malms. Chron., Hovendon's Annals, Roger of Wendover, Flowers of History, Henry of Huntingdon's Chron.

## CHAPTER V.

## LITERARY CHARACTER OF THE ABOVE PERIOD.

1. It will not be expected that a nation answering to the description given in the last chapter was an educated people. No, their intellectual acquirements were much inferior to the nation they subdued; and whilst the fugitive Britons in Wales had their schools which produced learned men, who were ornaments to their age, Saxon England remained in intense darkness. Nevertheless, the Saxons appear to have brought with them a knowledge of letters. Their writings, however, were not in Roman characters. Their system of letters was the Runic, the signs employed by them being denominated Runes. These letters were not only used in the formation of words, but each letter bearing the name of some object was often substituted for the object itself. Thus  $\mathfrak{A}$  (A, or Ac, Oak) was often written instead of the word oak.<sup>1</sup> The inconvenient shape of these Runic letters, however, rendered their extensive use in writing objectionable, and, indeed, it may be remarked, that they had been chiefly used previously in inscriptions.

2. From the above consideration, from the inconvenience attending the use of a second alphabet, and from the Roman abhorrence of everything connected with Saxon heathenism, the Roman missionaries, upon their arrival in England, substituted the Roman characters for these ancient Runes. Nevertheless, traces of the Runic alphabet have been discovered in MSS. of the twelfth century.<sup>2</sup> The application of these Runes was often curious; the letters of a person's name, for instance, being taken consecutively and entered in

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<sup>1</sup> Palgrave, 145. Bio. Brit. Lit. A. S. period, pp. 105, 502.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

the poem in Runic characters.<sup>1</sup> "The heathen Teutons supposed that these letters possessed magical powers. Some Runes, as they believed, could stop the vessel in her course, divert the arrow in its flight, cause love or hatred, raise the corpse from the grave, or cast the living into death-like slumber."<sup>2</sup> The most opposite constructions have been put upon some of the discovered Runic writings, and in many instances the inscriptions have baffled all the attempts of the learned to decipher.<sup>3</sup>

3. Notwithstanding the irruptions of the northern barbarians of the continent of Europe upon the southern and more civilized parts, learning made some progress there during the fifth century, especially in the east. Schools were erected at Rome, Constantinople, Marseilles, Edessa, Nisibis, Carthage, Lyons, and Treves, and indeed there were public schools in almost every city. Moreover, men were set apart for the special instruction of students, whilst the monks and bishops continued to instruct the youths intended for their own profession. The students of physic, and chemistry, and law, could find suitable instructors at Berytus, or Alexandria. A knowledge of the seven liberal arts was open to all who would take the trouble, and could find the pecuniary resources to acquire it. The instruction given in the public schools in the east was far superior to that offered in the monasteries, or in the palaces of the bishops, in the west, we may rest assured. The motives for furnishing it were different, the time for its communication longer, and rendered more appropriate, and the instructors more competent. The picture we possess of monastic education is by no means flattering. Thus Mosheim writes of the learning in the west during this period: "monks taught the *seven liberal arts*; but these, as we learn from Augustine's account of them, consisted only of a certain number of dry, subtile, and useless precepts, and were consequently more adapted to load and perplex the memory than to improve and strengthen the judgment. So that towards the close of this century the sciences were almost totally extinguished; at

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1 Bio. Brit. lib. A. S. period, p. 502.

2 Palgrave, 145.

3 Ibid.



least what remained of them was no more than a shadowy form, without either solidity or consistence.”<sup>1</sup>

4. The invasions of Visigoths and Ostrogoths on the continent were highly unfavourable to the progress of learning in Europe in the sixth century. In the west, indeed, its total extinction was only prevented by the monks, who were compelled to study and to teach,—and by the bishops, who either themselves taught in their respective palaces, or appointed teachers in their stead. To every cathedral church, indeed, a school was attached, and learning thus encouraged.<sup>2</sup> ; whilst in these schools libraries were formed, as well as in the monasteries. The amount of knowledge conveyed in these schools and monasteries appears to have been meagre in the extreme. The sciences were badly taught by indolent or incapable monks, the noble language of Greece neglected, whilst the Latin scholar spent his time in quibbles.<sup>3</sup> In the east, although the schools of Athens and Alexandria flourished, yet learning appeared to be upon the decline in this century ; yet its state was more hopeful here than in the west. In Britain all was darkness and confusion. The pagan Saxons were to be converted to christianity before a spark of learning could be perceived.

5. The history of the introduction of christianity among the Saxons is become too familiar to every schoolboy to need repetition here. The facts relating to Gregory and the Saxon slaves—his sympathy and benevolence—have been indelibly fixed upon the memory. The accounts of Augustine and his brother missionaries, their perils and success, have excited the interest, if not the admiration, of all.<sup>4</sup> They not only reformed the machinery for exchanging thought, but gave a stimulus to literary progress. Not a book probably existed in England at the time of their arrival. Augustine brought with him a few of these valuable articles,

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1 *Eccles. Hist.*, vol. ii, p. 18.

2 *Ibid*, vol. ii, p. 106.

3 *Ibid*.

4 Thierry gives a rather different version of the steps taken by Gregory to introduce christianity into Britain to the commonly received accounts. He says that Gregory ordered the Roman slave-markets to be searched for Anglo-Saxon youths of seventeen or eighteen years of age, and that the youths thus obtained were converted and prepared for missionary labours in England ; that the scheme, however, failed, and Gregory in consequence sent Augustine and other monks over.—*History of the Norman Conquest*, lib. i, p. 2. (Whittaker's edition.)

and this stock was increased by the liberality of the pope.<sup>1</sup> Thus not only was religion introduced into England by the Roman missionaries; but learning, the true handmaid of our system of enlightened faith, encouraged. Thenceforth there appeared an occasional architect laying the basis of Anglo-Saxon literature. Heathen customs gradually disappeared, and a more rational, because a more intellectual, course was manifested. Britain could once more boast of educational institutions, maintain scholars, and transmit to posterity some of the results of their labours. These results, however, were not immediately perceptible—ages passed ere the magnitude of the changes then in operation could be fully appreciated. The present day beholds the development which was then commenced.

6. The Saxons having passed the fifth and sixth centuries in pagan darkness and barbarian ignorance, we reflect with pleasure upon the introduction of christianity as a period whence we are to anticipate a better order of things. The year 597, A.D.,<sup>2</sup> is memorable in English annals as the date of Augustine's arrival in England. Every effort was made by the zealous missionary to propagate the gospel, and not without considerable success. Many assistants came over from Rome to his aid. Bishops were soon consecrated by him,<sup>3</sup> and a new christian province announced. We at length obtain some positive information, illustrating the effects which religion had upon education at this early period.

7. In the year 635, A.D., Sigebert ascended the throne of East Anglia, upon the death of his brother, Earpwald, the late sovereign. Sigebert had been living an exile in France for some time, having fled there through fear of Redwald, Earpwald's predecessor. He did not reside there, however, without jealously noticing the superior literary condition of that country. Upon his return to England, and assuming the sovereignty of East Anglia, he became a great practical reformer. Learned men found in him a powerful patron, and in his court a sure place of refuge.<sup>4</sup> Bede informs us<sup>5</sup> that upon his return "being desirous to imitate the good

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1 Bede, lib. i, c. 29.

2 Anglo-Saxon Chron.

3 Bede, lib. i, c. 29.

4 Bede's Hist. Eng., lib. iii, c. 18, 19.

5 Ibid.

institutions which he had seen in France, he set up a school for youths to be instructed in literature," and was assisted therein by bishop Felix, who came to him from Kent, and who furnished him with masters and teachers after the manner of that country.

7. This was a great step, but it was soon followed by another whose importance threw the former into obscurity. About the year A.D. 668, the English archbishop, Wighard, successor of Deusdeuit, died at Rome, whither he had proceeded that his appointment to the archbishopric might be confirmed by the pope. Adrian, an African, and abbot of a monastery near Naples, was then offered the primacy. He declined the honour, however, though offered to him more than once; but recommended, after having been a second time applied to, Theodore, a learned monk at Rome, but a native of Tarsus, to the vacant office. Upon the appointment of Theodore to the primacy, Adrian agreed to accompany him to England, and upon his arrival here was immediately appointed, by the archbishop, to the monastery of St. Peter of Canterbury, where he lived for thirty-nine years.<sup>1</sup> "Nothing could be more fortunate for the Anglo-Saxon literature than the settlement of those men in England," remarks Turner; "both were well versed in sacred and profane literature, and thoroughly acquainted with the Greek and Latin languages. Both were animated with the greatest zeal for the welfare of the people over whom they were called upon to preside." They soon obtained a world-wide reputation in consequence of their literary attainments. Perhaps Adrian's fame predominated. His disinterestedness in refusing the archbishopric, although repeatedly pressed upon him—his zeal and his learning—all contributed alike to exalt his character. William of Malmesbury even termed him "a fountain of letters and a river of arts." The conversation and exhortations of these good men proved excellent stimuli at this dark period, and excited among the Anglo-Saxons a great emulation in literary studies. A crowd of pupils soon gathered round them, "and there daily flowed from them rivers of knowledge to water the hearts of their hearers; and, together with the books of holy writ,

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<sup>1</sup> Bede's Hist. Eng., lib. iv, c. 1.



they also taught them the arts of ecclesiastical poetry, astronomy, and arithmetic.”<sup>1</sup> They obtained a reward which the zealous do not always realize. The fruits of their labours became manifest to themselves. Their success was proportioned to their exertions. Many of their pupils, we are informed, were as well versed in the Greek and Latin tongue as in their own native language.<sup>2</sup> Ere a century had elapsed from Augustine’s arrival the state of society in England had greatly changed. A desire for learning had arisen in the minds of a few. England could again boast of schools and scholars. Paganism had received its death-blow in the island, and a fervent zeal for religion had widely spread. The sabbath day once more attained its wonted reverence, to the great temporal as well as spiritual comfort of the people.<sup>3</sup>

8. It will not be uninteresting to notice the subjects of study during the seventh century. Our information on this head is singularly satisfactory. We have the authority of the venerable Bede, as well as that of the celebrated student Aldhelm himself. First with regard to Bede’s information. When speaking of the acts of Sigebert, before referred to, he inserts a long account of a holy man, named Fursey, who, coming from Ireland, was received by the king, and spent a large portion of the remainder of his life in instructing the English people in the principles<sup>4</sup> of christianity. Religion, being of primary importance, was the subject in which the many received instruction. We also learn from Bede, as has been before remarked, that Theodore and Adrian instructed their pupils in the books of holy writ; they also taught them ecclesiastical poetry, astronomy and arithmetic; whilst the Greek and Latin languages were subjects of the most particular study.<sup>5</sup>

9. The testimony of Aldhelm is equally precise. In a letter written to the bishop of Winchester, which is still preserved in “*Anglia Sacra*,” he informs us that he was at the time of writing the letter engaged in studying Roman jurisprudence, the art of poetry, arithmetic, astro-

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1 Bede’s Hist. Eng., lib. iv, c. 2.

2 Ibid.

3 Bede’s Hist. Eng.—Palgrave’s Hist. A. Saxons, p. 68.

4 Bede’s Hist. Eng., lib. i, c. 19.

5 Bede, lib. iv, c. 2.

nomy, and astrology. Although geography is not mentioned in the preceding list, that subject was doubtless investigated according to the imperfect state of knowledge which then prevailed in relation to it. Thus not only were the elementary subjects studied at this early period, but the higher branches of learning also.

10. Concerning the character of the seminaries of learning which then existed we know very little. At Canterbury there certainly was a school: in East Anglia, as we have before remarked, there was another. Whether there were schools at Oxford or Cambridge at this period we have no means of ascertaining. In the different monasteries established there were doubtless schools, but no particulars respecting them have reached us.<sup>1</sup>

11. During this century the prospects of the Britons grew gradually worse. Driven, as they had been, amongst the mountains on the western side of England, they, in these inaccessible retreats, made their power to be felt by joining any of the disaffected Saxons against their rulers, allying themselves to any new invading army, and, in short, taking every opportunity to annoy the plunderers of their homes. These continually harassing attacks, however, brought down upon them the furious wrath of the different Saxon tribes, who, uniting, whenever they could forget their rival animosities, took signal vengeance upon the unhappy remnant of the British race.

12. I have before had occasion to mention the monastery of Bangor, in Wales. This, for a long period of time, was the university of the kingdom. Here was to be found a most valuable library, and scholars capable of wisely using it. The commencement of this century, however, witnessed its destruction. Ethelfrid, king of Northumberland, marched to Chester, A.D. 607,<sup>2</sup> and took possession of the city, slaying great numbers of monks, who had assembled there to pray for the safety of the place.<sup>3</sup> The enraged Saxon prince then marched to Bangor, from whence these monks had come, destroyed the monastery and burnt its

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1 Henry's Hist. Eng., vol. iv, lib. ii, c. 4.

2 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

3 According to the A. S. Chron. two hundred were slain. Bede states that there were twelve hundred. (Hist. Eng., lib. ii, c. 2.)

valuable library.<sup>1</sup> Thus perished, by the ruthless hands of barbarians, another library which the industry of ages had been employed in collecting.<sup>2</sup>

13. So great a blow to the literary progress of a nation could not have been easily overcome, yet Wales still afforded a shelter to the learned, and the countenance of princes was extended towards them. But a few years after the destruction of the above monastery we find that the court of Cadwallon, the king of North Wales, was deemed a suitable place for the instruction of Edwin, the heir apparent to the crown of Northumberland. The learned men surrounding Cadwallon at this period were probably refugees from the monastery at Bangor. The chequered career of the kingdom of Wales during the remainder of the century was most unfavourable to learning, and we therefore hear little more respecting matters of this description.

14. If to the British antiquary there be unpleasant reminiscences connected with the commencement of the seventh century, in consequence of the destruction of such antiquities as Bangor must have possessed at that period, the history of the latter part of the century is calculated in some measure to cheer him. If a library was lost, libraries were also founded. Theodore brought with him a store of books, which was doubtless carefully deposited in the monastery of Canterbury with the companions brought here by Augustine; and no doubt the library was as carefully increased as opportunities presented themselves. But Benedict Biscop made the most important progress in the formation of a library in this century. Several times did this zealous scholar journey to Rome to obtain books for his monastery at Wearmouth, and never returned empty-handed.<sup>3</sup> Neither money nor time was spared by him in making his collection. Books were then only obtained at an enormous cost, and were lent by the principal of one convent to another for the purpose of transcribing only under the strictest regulations, yet their number rapidly increased.

15. A very few words will describe the state of learning

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1 Warrington's Hist. of Wales, vol. i, p. 130.

2 Some place the date of the destruction of the monastery of Bangor in the year 613.

3 See chap. 14, Article Benedict Biscop.



on the continent during this period. In the east it miserably declined. In the west it was almost entirely in the hands of the monks, and although no abbot was allowed to be elected who had not at least the reputation of being a learned man, yet as his character was to be judged by those whose education was of a mean order, the standard was necessarily low. One regulation of the monks, however, must not pass unnoticed here, so excellent was it in principle, that had it been zealously carried out learning could not have been long destitute of honourable names. The monks were required to consecrate a certain portion of their time daily to study and reading. *Certain hours were appointed for them to communicate to each other the results of their study, and to discuss what they had been reading.*<sup>1</sup> Such a regulation needed but enforcement under the guidance of able men to have produced the most beneficial effects. But it was probably in most cases evaded. Where enforced it lost much of its usefulness from the trifling character of the reading enjoined. Not even the Bible in its purity could occupy the attention of the students; but the fabled miracles of saints took up the greater part of their time.

16. During the eighth century learning declined on the continent, whilst in Britain and Ireland, on the contrary, it flourished. Among the Greeks there were but trivial writers, whilst on our island flourished such men as Aldhelm, Bede, and Alcuin. Towards the close of the century the efforts of Charlemagne to improve the literary condition of France, as well as to increase its territories, mark a new era. That monarch invited learned men to France, and rendered his court attractive by the rewards he offered to them. Then it was that the Palantine school was established there, where the great men of his empire might have their sons educated. To have studied the trivium and quadrivium then was a point of distinction. To have mastered the works of Cassiodorus and Boethius was to have obtained the goal of human distinction.<sup>2</sup>

17. We now pass on briefly to notice the progress of learning in Britain in the eighth century. The fruits of the labours of Theodore and Adrian now made their appearance.

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1 Mosheim's Eccles. Hist., vol. ii, p. 165, et passim.

2 Mosheim's Eccles. Hist., vol. ii, p. 217, et passim.

The close of the seventh century, and the commencement of the eighth, were doubtless the periods thus referred to by Alfred in his letters to the bishop of London: "I must inform you, my dear friend, that I often revolve in my mind the many learned and wise men, who formerly flourished in the English nation, both among the clergy and laity. How happy were those times! Then the princes governed their subjects with great wisdom, according to the word of God, and became famous for their wise and upright administration. Then the clergy were equally diligent in reading, studying, and teaching; and this country was so famous for learning, that many came hither from foreign parts to be instructed. Then (before all was spoiled and burned) the churches and monasteries were filled with libraries of excellent books in several languages."<sup>1</sup>

19. The former part of the eighth century was illuminated by those brilliant characters, Egwin of Worcester, the celebrated founder of Evesham abbey; Eddius Stephanus, John of Beverley, Tobias, bishop of Rochester, Ceolfrid, the friend of Benedict Biscop, Egbert, Eadfrith, Berctwald, Tatwine, Felix, Wilbrord, Bede, Acca, Albinus, Nothelm, Daniel, Ethelwald, Forthhere, Hwebert, Plegwin, Withtred, and Cuthbert. Whilst in the latter part of the century flourished Egbert of York, Boniface, Willibald, Willehad, and Alcuin.<sup>2</sup>

20. During this period there was of course nothing like intellectual education in the true acceptation of the term. Even the instruction then attempted to be communicated was most rudimental in character, and often in substance absurd and the methods employed in teaching appear to have been most imperfect. Turner has given us a specimen of the Socratic mode of instruction in those days. How inferior is it to the specimens of the teaching of Socrates which we possess. The scholar questions thus: "What is a letter? The keeper of history. What is a word? The betrayer of the mind. What is air? The preserver of life. What is man? The slave of death; a transient traveller; a local guest. What is man like? An apple. How is man placed?"

<sup>1</sup> Henry's Hist. of Britain, vol. iv, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> This list of names is extracted from the Bio. Brit. Lib., where a particular account of each of them may be seen. The chief of them will be noticed in the last chapter of this work.

As a lamp in the wind. Where is he placed? Between six walls. What? Above, below, before, behind, on the right hand and on the left. How many companions has he? Four. Whom? Heat, cold, dryness, wet. In how many ways is he changeable? Six. Which are they? Hunger, fulness, rest, labour, watchings, and sleep. Who is that whom you cannot see unless you shut your eyes? He who sneezes will shew him to you. I saw a man with eight in his hand; he took away seven and six remained? School-boys know this. How can a thing be, yet not exist? In name and not in fact." These specimens will be sufficient to show the uselessness and even absurdity of some portions of their instruction, the unsoundness, or the involved character of others, and the poetical style of all. We perceive, however, by this specimen that useful instruction was *attempted* to be conveyed. Grammar, rhetoric, poetry, astronomy, and natural history were all encouraged; the character of the instruction in which will appear from the brief but just remark of Hallam.<sup>1</sup> "The arithmetic of Cassiodorus<sup>2</sup> (or Capella, a chief authority of the time) occupies little more than two folio pages, and does not contain one word of the common rules. The geometry is much the same; in two pages we have some definitions and axioms, but nothing further. His logic is longer and better, extending to sixteen folio pages. The grammar is very short and trifling. The rhetoric is the same." Learning was confined to the priests, or clerks as they were termed, and they wrote a wretched Latin. Their attention, however, was particularly directed to church music, even at this early period, and we find Grimbald invited over from Rheims in consequence of his skill in musical science. The most powerful noblemen, or even kings, were unable to sign their own names. "If a man could write, or even read, his knowledge was considered as 'proof' presumptive that he was in holy orders." What a melancholy picture! How mar-

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<sup>1</sup> Literary History of Europe, vol. i, p. 3, note.

<sup>2</sup> Cassiodorus was born at Squillace, in Naples, A.D. 470; became secretary of state to Theodoric, king of the Goths, and consul, A.D. 514. He was in great credit in the reigns of Athalaric and Vitiges. At the age of seventy he retired to a monastery in Calabria, where he constructed sun-dials, water hour-glasses, and perpetual lamps. He wrote on "Divine Institutions," "A Treatise on the Soul," &c. — *Cyclopædia Britan.*



vellously have times changed! Then the ability to write or even read was the exception—now the rule. But what constituted superiority in those days when intellectual development remained almost upon an equality among all classes? The distinctions were perhaps as artificial then as now. The pride of descent and of aristocratic connections was even then manifested; natural and improved ability as much respected; and wealth as unequally diffused. Hengist gloried in his descent from Woden. Subsequently Dunstan's elevation was the result of his various acquirements, and the high natural order of his mind; and Godwin's immense possessions armed him with kingly power.

21. The utility of letters was then by no means apparent. Commerce was carried on principally by truck or barter, or by payments in ready money. Simplicity marked every transaction. "When land was sold, the owner cut a turf from the green sward and cast it into the lap of the purchaser, as a token that the possession of the earth was transferred; or he tore off a branch of a tree, and put it in the hand of the grantee, to show that the latter was to be entitled to the products of the soil. And when the purchaser of a house received *seizen*, or possession, the key of the door, or a bundle of thatch plundered from the roof, signified that the dwelling had been yielded up to him. These symbols were sometimes varied by the fancy of the grantor. One delivered a knife with a hair of his beard, another a glove, a third a currycomb, a fourth a drinking-horn."<sup>1</sup> The usages of civilized life, extended commerce, varied transactions, and the requirements of society, induce intellectual improvement. Extended demands produce improved machinery, and the simple wants of childhood are displaced by the serious requirements of advanced age. In all this there is progression. Human nature is endowed with the property of development.

22. The impediments to general book-learning in that rude age, even had the inclination to study existed, would have been immense. When the manufacture of paper and the invention of printing were among the things to be, no very general advance in scientific pursuits could be expected.

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<sup>1</sup> Palgrave's Hist. of Eng. A. S. period, p. 151.

Though the classical authors of Greece and Rome have immortalized their country by the imperishable lustre of their names without the art of printing, yet it must be borne in mind that the learning of the age was monopolized by the privileged few. "Philosophy taught that while the few should be instructed, it was necessary to withhold instruction from the multitude."<sup>1</sup> Orally the Anglo-Saxons were taught some poetic strains, to stimulate them in the discharge of their martial duties, or elevate them in their banqueting halls. But this was not the general character of the Anglo-Saxon themes. "Some such poetry, the only kind that was known among their neighbours, they unquestionably had; but other subjects and other styles of composition soon displaced it."

23. "While the Saxons contended with the Britons for the sovereignty of the land, learning was banished, or fled of its own accord." As soon, however, as they became free from internal dissensions, had submitted to one ruler, and had, moreover, delivered themselves from external enemies, the work of education commenced. True the tide ebbed and flowed—now without a glimmer to denote the existence of the spark of life, and now reinvigorated by the patronage of an Alfred, or the learning of a Bede. Yet educational efforts progressed, and, reared upon the basis of Anglo-Saxon institutions and Anglo-Saxon literature, England at the present day offers an educational model, if not in itself perfect, yet in many points of view deserving of the highest admiration.

24. There is little to cheer our minds whilst studying the literary or social condition of the people of this country during the period we have been considering. The mass of the people still remained in a state of the most profound ignorance. Their minds were governed by the most ridiculous fancies of superstition. The most learned portion of the community—the priesthood—imposed upon their flocks by the narration of the most extraordinary miracles, and seem even to have induced themselves to believe that miraculous powers were vested in them. The history of their battles becomes monotonous, and even tame, not only from

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<sup>1</sup> Farr.

the frequency of their occurrence but from the absence of every particle of information, or indication of progress, which might tend to instruct and elevate a reader.

25. The histories of personages of the smallest absolute importance, if compared with the attainments of a modern school-boy, have been studied with earnestness, and the most minute circumstances of their lives investigated with the utmost labour, if haply some new ray of light might be discovered among them, or some fresh tittle of information gained respecting their manners, customs, religion, or literature.



## CHAPTER VI.

## THE REIGN OF ALFRED.

1. The importance of Alfred's reign seems to demand a separate chapter; for during this period the banners of the raven floated triumphantly on the embattlements of England's castles, defying the efforts of the Saxons, and presaging the period when the Saxon people should be compelled to own the Danes' undisputed sway. This was the period when England's monasteries could boast of a most valuable collection of books, original and transcribed: but it was also the period when those books were committed to the flames by the rude hands of northern barbarians: when literature decayed, and the learned deserted their distressed country for a more peaceful abode on a foreign shore. This also was the period of the revival of learning, when, stimulated by the patronising hands of the sovereign, the seed, once again sown in a more congenial soil, germinated and produced fruits, the effects of which remain visible to the present day. This was the era when learning in England was at its lowest ebb, and this also was the period when it received a re-animation, which though momentarily checked by the indolence or troubles of succeeding monarchs, yet never wholly disappeared.

2. Alfred, the youngest son of Ethelwulf and Osberga, was born at Wantage in Berkshire, in the year 849.<sup>1</sup> His genealogy is thus amusingly traced by his biographer. "King Alfred was the son of king Ethelwulf, who was the son of Egbert, who was the son of Elmund, who was the son of Eafa, who was the son of Eoppa, who was the son of Ingild. Ingild and Ina, the two famous kings of the West

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1. Asser's Life of Alfred the Great.

Saxons, were two brothers. Ina went to Rome, and there ending this life honourably, entered the heavenly kingdom, to reign there for ever with Christ. Ingild and Ina were the sons of Coenred, who was the son of Ceolwald, who was the son of Cudam, who was the son of Cuthwin, who was the son of Ceawlin, who was the son of Cynric, who was the son of Creoda, who was the son of Cerdic, who was the son of Elesa, who was the son of Gewis, from whom the Britons name all that nation Gegwis,<sup>1</sup> who was the son of Brond, who was the son of Beldeg, who was the son of Woden, who was the son of Frithowald, who was the son of Frelaf, who was the son of Frithuwulf, who was the son of Finn of Godwulf, who was the son of Geat ..... Geat was the son of Tætwa, who was the son of Beaw, who was the son of Sceldi, who was the son of Heremode, who was the son of Itermon, who was the son of Hathra, who was the son of Guala, who was the son of Bedwig, who was the son of Shem, who was the son of Noah, who was the son of Enoch, who was the son of Malaleel, who was the son of Cainan, who was the son of Enos, who was the son of Seth, who was the son of Adam."

3. Alfred appears to have had a prepossessing appearance, and, inheriting the privilege of younger children, won the particular affection of his father Ethelwulf, who sent him to Rome when but four years of age with a noble escort, there to be presented to the pope.<sup>2</sup> Alfred appears to have returned home again after a very short residence with the "Holy Father," for in the year 855 he revisited the eternal city in company with his father, who remained there a year. Ethelwulf probably left the young Alfred at Rome, where he must have stayed for some length of time, for we read in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle<sup>3</sup> that when the pope heard that Ethelwulf was dead, (which event took place two years after his return from Rome) he anointed Alfred king.

4. What little we know of his early life is gathered from his biographer, Asser, In his history we have many diffi-

<sup>1</sup> West Saxons.

<sup>2</sup> A. S. Chron., sub. an. 853.

<sup>3</sup> It is said, and indeed it appears probable, that Ethelwulf designed Alfred to be his successor, and if such was his idea it was doubtless made known to the pope, which will account for the pope's anointing him to be king.—See Turner's Hist. An. Sax., vol. i, p. 420, 429.

culties to reconcile, which in the absence of authentic information, can only be attempted by conjecture. Thus he informs us that Alfred, by the unworthy neglect of his parents and nurses, remained illiterate (*illiteratus permansit*) even till he was twelve years old or more; yet in the same paragraph he says that "he (Alfred) was loved by his father and mother, and even by all the people, above all his brothers, and was educated altogether at the court of the king. As he advanced through the years of infancy and youth, his form appeared more comely than that of his brothers; in looks, in speech, and in manners he was more graceful than they. His noble nature implanted in him from his cradle a love of wisdom above all things: he listened with serious attention to the Saxon poems which he often heard recited, and easily retained them in his docile memory. He was a zealous practiser of hunting in all its branches, and with great assiduity and success; for skill and good fortune in this art, as in all others, are among the gifts of God, as we also have often witnessed."<sup>1</sup> Had Asser omitted the remark respecting Alfred's ignorance we could readily have surmised that his instruction had not been altogether neglected in his father's house—that whilst at Rome he admired what other children might have neglected—and that he returned home as well educated a boy as any of his own age and generation. So totally at variance does the remark seem with the other portions of the paragraph, and the subsequent history of Alfred, that I cannot resist the conviction that it is an interpolation, or at least a corrupted passage. Asser informs us that his mother shewed him and his brothers a volume of beautifully illuminated Saxon poetry, promising to give it to him who should first master the book, and that Alfred carried off the prize. This event has been attributed to the period after his father's marriage with Judith, and his mother, in the text explained to be his step-mother. There seems no necessity, however, for such a change; for in the first place we have no evidence of his return to England until a period when neither himself nor his brother would be so likely to compete for such an illuminated prize as at the earlier age of five or six, when his own mother might have

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<sup>1</sup> Asser's Life of Alfred.



been still alive:<sup>1</sup> and secondly, there seems to be no necessity for supposing that Alfred could read the book except by learning it by rote, which he might easily have done at the age of six. That Alfred's subsequent education was neglected we learn from his own words, which are confirmed by a knowledge of the character of the times in which he lived. Asser informs us that Alfred confessed with many lamentations and sighs that "one of his greatest difficulties and impediments in this life was that when he was young and had the capacity for learning he could not find teachers." And we learn from Alfred's preface to his translation of Gregory's "Pastorale," that at his accession to the throne he did not know a person south of the Thames who understood the service in English, or could translate a Latin sentence.

4. Alfred's name does not appear in connection with the general history of his country until the reign of his brother Ethelred, when he appears to have been actively engaged in repelling the invasions of the Danes. In the year 868 he married a daughter of the earl of the Gaini (inhabitants of Gainsborough). He at this time occupied but a subordinate station.<sup>2</sup> In the same year we learn that the king of Mercia begged the assistance of Ethelred and his brother Alfred in his contests with the Danes, and thenceforward we find Alfred fighting side by side with his brother against the same barbarians.<sup>3</sup> At length, in the year 871, Alfred was, upon the death of his brother Ethelred, elevated to the throne of Wessex. Scarcely a month had elapsed after his accession when he was called upon to fight with the Danes at Wilton, and for a period of eight or nine years afterwards his life was a perpetual struggle with these northern pirates.

5. The early part of Alfred's reign was not only disturbed by the invasions of the Danes, but was also affected by his own imprudence; for Asser informs us that "in the beginning of his reign, when he was a youth, and influenced by youthful feelings, he would not listen to the petitions which his subjects made to him for help in their necessities, or for

<sup>1</sup> I am aware that it has been asserted that his own mother was repudiated, and that himself and brothers took refuge with her: but I can discover no just ground for such an assertion.

<sup>2</sup> Asser.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.—A. S. Chron., sub, an. 868.

relief from those who oppressed them,—but he repulsed them from him, and paid no heed to their requests.” In this very untoward circumstance we perceive one of those incidents which tended to surname Alfred “the Great;” for by it he was led to see how important to a sovereign is the affection of his subjects, and that whilst firm discipline is essential to good order, contempt of the reasonable requests and complaints of the subjects induces difficulties of the most formidable description. Alfred’s neglect of the petitions of his subjects was retaliated by them in a general defection in the hour of extreme peril, and the victorious Alfred was at length compelled to succumb to the ferocious attacks of the Danes, and hide himself in the woody glens of Athelney. Many romantic stories are told of him whilst in this situation—none of which have gained more general credence, perhaps, than the herdsman’s wife and the cakes. This tale, originating in Asser, is perpetuated in Hume, who asserts that it has been recorded by all the historians. Although possibly true, Hume is hardly correct when he makes the above assertion, for most of the old historians, as William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, and the authors of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, are silent upon the subject,—whilst Roger of Wendover, and Matthew of Westminster, evidently following Asser, record it. We are also told that whilst on the isle he gave a portion of his last remaining loaf to a poor christian beggar,—that St. Cuthbert afterwards appeared to him in a vision, and promised him victory over his enemies and re-establishment upon the throne.<sup>1</sup> Soon after this, having made his subjects acquainted with his locality, and having previously made several important sallies against the Danish outposts, he engaged the Danes in a great battle and completely defeated them.<sup>2</sup> William of Malmesbury and Ingulph tell us that before the battle he entered the Danish camp in the disguise of a minstrel, and having carefully observed the supineness of his enemies made his dispositions accordingly. This story, however, rests upon the sole authority of William of Malmesbury and Ingulph. Guthrum was the leader of the Danes in the battle which followed, and having been overcome gave hostages to Alfred and

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<sup>1</sup> Ingulph’s History of the Abbey of Croyland, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Asser.—A. S. Chron., sub. an. 878.

was baptized, Alfred becoming godfather to him.<sup>1</sup> After this victory Guthrum was put in possession of East Anglia, which he governed as a vassal of Alfred.

6. After this defeat of the Danes Alfred enjoyed such a period of repose as he had not for many years previously done. Not that he was inactive, but he was comparatively free from the harassing attacks of his enemies. Now, he wisely considered, was the time to improve the means at his disposal for the defence of his kingdom. From the nature and position of his country he had long perceived that the true means of defence would consist of "wooden walls," and had accordingly laid the foundation of the British navy. Now he increased the number of his vessels, and improved their construction.<sup>2</sup> His efforts to improve the efficiency of the defence of his country was neither needless nor vain. His enemies at length returned in full force. In the year 882<sup>3</sup> "Alfred went out to sea with his ships, and fought against the forces of four ships of Danish men, and took two of the ships." "In the year 885<sup>4</sup> he sent a fleet to East Anglia. So soon as they came to the mouth of the Stour, there met them sixteen ships of pirates; and they fought against them and captured all the ships and killed the men. As they afterwards returned homewards with the booty, a large fleet of pirates met them, and then fought against them that same day, and the Danish men had the victory." In this manner were the ships engaged which Alfred had built. They must evidently have saved the English people from many hostile incursions of their enemies.

7. The remnant of Guthrum's army, which did not feel disposed to settle down in the East Anglian district, left the country and visited the neighbouring territory of France,<sup>5</sup> "where," in the words of William of Malmesbury, "the inhabitants are best able to tell what cruelties they perpetrated. For overrunning the whole maritime coast to the Tuscan sea, they unpeopled Paris, Tours, as well as many

1 Asser.—Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

2 "The vessels he built were galleys, generally rowed with oars, some even with sixty on each side, and were twice as long, deeper, swifter, and less 'wavy,' or rolling, than the ships of the Danes. These vessels were not so well adapted for commercial purposes as for warfare, they having accommodation for a large force, and affording room for fighting."—THE SHIP: its Origin and Progress.

3 Anglo-Saxon Chron., sub. an. 882.

4 Ibid, sub. an. 885.

5 Ibid, sub. an. 800.



other cities seated on the Seine and Loire.” Thirteen years afterwards the Danes returned to the former scenes of their depredations, for in the year 893<sup>1</sup> two hundred and fifty ships landed at Linne-mouth, a port in the eastern part of Kent, and shortly afterwards, Hastings, with a fleet of eighty vessels, sailed up the Thames and constructed a port at Milton. This was indeed a most formidable invasion, and to a king of England inferior in ability to Alfred must have proved fatal. But notwithstanding the assistance rendered to these pirates by their countrymen settled in England, they soon experienced the difference between fighting an army without a leader, and one directed by the superior talents of Alfred. The king had not slumbered in security whilst his enemies were wasting other states, and weakening their own forces in the contest; but had, on the other hand, been preparing for the blow which might at any moment he well knew, be dealt out to himself. When the two divisions of the great army of the Danes arrived, therefore, Alfred was prepared to meet them. He threw himself between the two forces, hoping to bring them to an engagement; and when the Danes who had landed in Kent attempted to join their countrymen at Milton, he hotly pursued them and defeated them at Farnham,<sup>2</sup> upon which they returned to Essex and there intrenched themselves. The Northumbrian and East Anglian Danes now fitted out a fleet of one hundred and forty ships, and sent them to the south of England, where a portion of them besieged Exeter. Thither Alfred followed them, and drove them to their ships with great slaughter. Meanwhile the citizens of London, aided by the troops Alfred had left behind, attacked Hastings at Banfleet, routed his army, and took his wife and children prisoners, together with great booty. After this the Danes at Essex joined the forces of Hastings, marched up the Thames, and across to Butlington on the Severn. Here they were reduced by Alfred to a state of famine, and at length dispersed themselves as they best could. Their main power was now broken down: nevertheless they continued to harass Alfred for some time afterwards, but their attacks were often anticipated, and the booty taken by them often regained.

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1 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub. an. 893.

2 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, sub. an. 894.

This was Alfred's last great struggle. He died in the year 901.

8. Having taken a succinct view of the history of Alfred in his youth, and in his struggles with the Danes, let us now glance at him in his character of lawgiver and politician; as a pupil and as a teacher; in his family; as a man and as a christian.

9. At the time when Alfred ascended the throne, the labours of Theodore, Adrian, and Bede had been well nigh forgotten, the dark night of ignorance eclipsing their momentous labours. The few learned men that this country produced had been sent or enticed to other lands. Thus Offa had sent the learned Alcuin to the court of Charlemagne, where he became preceptor to the emperor, and was laden with honours. In the year 704 the learned Boniface deserted his country and became archbishop of Mayence. Dungal and Clemens followed his example, whilst Joannes Scotus Erigena, an Irishman, devoted his talents to the benefit of the French, and thus were the British islands robbed of the brightest of their ornaments. The time had not yet arrived when scholars should find a home and patronage in England not to be despised.

10. At the period of Alfred's accession to the throne, manuscripts were the only books attainable, and those only with vast difficulty and at an enormous cost.<sup>1</sup> He was from his youth passionately fond of poetry. He had listened to the minstrels, or Anglo-Saxon gleemen, with enraptured ears, catching their strains and bearing them in his memory. He soon manifested himself to be the friend of learning, and under his auspices the work progressed with astonishing rapidity. No sooner had he subdued his external enemies than the internal affairs of his kingdom engrossed his primary attention. And a melancholy appearance did England then present. The devastations of the Danes had desolated every home. Learning had of course been banished from

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<sup>1</sup> Bede informs us that Alfred gave to bishop Benedict as much land as eight ploughs could work in exchange for a single copy of *Cosmography*, or geographical description of the earth. The Saxon MSS. were so elaborately prepared, and embellished with such costly illuminations, that their value was thus enormously enhanced. Thus we are told that Wilfred ordered the four evangelists to be written, of purest gold, on purple-colored parchments, for the benefit of his soul, and he had a case made for them of gold, adorned with precious stones.—Turner, p. 422.



almost every mind ; self-preservation and the security of the kingdom having secured the attention of all. Alfred, however, was no less a philanthropist than a warrior. His bowels yearned over his country's degradation. In his prologue to "The Pastorale," he laments that England could not boast of the wise men it once possessed. He mournfully refers to the former happy state of England, its monasteries, its scholars, and its books ; how formerly men were attracted by the fame of its learning, but how now learned men had to be invited from abroad.

11. Alfred's perseverance had surmounted his external difficulties, and, notwithstanding his chequered career, he was no mean scholar. He must communicate the blessings he had received to others. And soon did the advantages of his perseverance render themselves perceptible. He sought out the most learned of his subjects, and placed them in offices of trust. Werefrith, bishop of Worcester, was ordered to translate the Dialogue of pope Gregory and Peter from Latin into Saxon. Plegmund was made archbishop of Canterbury, and Ethelstan and Werewulf his priests and chaplains.<sup>1</sup> He invited learned foreigners to his kingdom, and secured to them his powerful patronage. Grimbald was brought from Rheims, in consequence of his skill in church music, and placed over the monastery at Winchester. John was sent for from Saxony, and made abbot of the monastery at Athelney. And Asser, a monk of St. David's, was continually with him, assisting him in his studies and aiding him with his counsel.<sup>2</sup> Shaftesbury abbey was filled with nuns, and Alfred's daughter, Ethelgiva, made abbess. Embassies were sent to him from foreign nations, which were alike gratifying to his vanity and significant of the respect in which he was held. Asser informs us, in inflated language, that they came to him from the Tyrrhenian sea to the farthest end of Ireland, and that the patriarch at Jerusalem sent him letters and presents. Pope Martin presented him with no small portion of the venerable cross on which our Lord Jesus Christ was suspended. Alfred sent messengers also to other lands. Frequent journeys were under-

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<sup>1</sup> Asser's Life of Alfred.

<sup>2</sup> Asser.—W. of Malmesbury's Chronicle



taken to Rome, to convey presents to the head of the church, and even to St. Thomas in India. Indeed, Sighelm, bishop of Sherborne, his ambassador, penetrated into India, and returned laden with precious gems and aromatic spices, which were of the highest value in those days.<sup>1</sup> Alfred also founded monasteries, and, as was before related, set over them the most learned men he could find.<sup>2</sup>

12. At his accession to the throne monasteries had been destroyed, the monks murdered, and the libraries burnt; and we are informed that not one priest in the district south of the Thames could interpret the Latin services read over in the churches. Fearful state of ignorance! Ruthless Danes! How often has northern barbarism produced similar effects.

13. Alfred not only invited learned foreigners to England, but handsomely provided for them while here. He gave a great stimulus to learning by founding a school for the education of his subjects, which has been considered the foundation of the University of Oxford. In this school books were read both in Latin and Saxon.<sup>3</sup> Assiduous in his own studies, he inspired those around him with energy. Anxious to promote the education of his own family,<sup>4</sup> and watchful of the direction their studies took, he was a bright example to his subjects. Scarcely, indeed, do we know whether to admire most his courage and military skill, his undaunted resolution in adversity, his humane feelings and generous actions as a warrior, his political sagacity as a legislator, his patriotic devotion to his country, his assiduous perseverance as a student, or his exemplary character as a husband, a father, and a man. Perhaps never man united these splendid qualities in so perfect a manner. Without displaying the military combinations of an Alexander or a Napoleon,—without rivalling the legislation of a Lycurgus,—without emulating the devotion of a Leonidas, he nevertheless combined the qualities of these great men with others

1 William of Malmesbury's Chronicle.

2 Asser.

3 Asser.

4 We are informed that Ethelwerd, his youngest son, was consigned to the public schools of learning, where, with the children of almost all the nobility of the country, and many also who were not noble, he prospered under the diligent care of his teachers.

more exalted; and if an Alexander, a Cæsar, or a Napoleon eclipsed him in the magnitude of their martial exploits, so did they in their vices. The virtues of Alfred will be revered when the deeds of the former shall be remembered with abhorrence.

14. It is remarkable that Alfred should have perceived at this period that the utility of education alone would not form a sufficient inducement to its general diffusion. He saw that its difficulties and remote advantages, the sacrifices and mental labours it demanded, would tend to deter the illiterate from readily embracing it. He, therefore, adopted the singular expedient of a compulsory system of education. Alfred required that "before his nobles cultivated the arts adapted to manly strength, as hunting, they might make themselves acquainted with liberal knowledge." This, indeed, was a great step in advance of his age. Many of Alfred's thanes, although advanced in years, were compelled to learn that they might discharge the duties of their offices satisfactorily. Free landholders, possessed of two hides of land or more, were compelled to send their children to school; whilst those persons who were too old to learn to read, were required to send a son, kinsman, or servant to be educated, who may read to them. The result of this regulation was that the old nobles "lamented with deep sighs in their inmost hearts that in their youth they had never attended to such studies, and they blessed the young men of our days who happily could be instructed in the liberal arts, whilst they execrated their own lot, that they had not learned these things in their youth, and now when they were old though wishing to learn they were unable."<sup>1</sup> Though this last regulation may provoke a smile, it must be borne in mind that we are speaking of England in the ninth century, when the country was in a state of profound darkness, and when extraordinary times demanded extraordinary measures, —when laws to be understood and rendered beneficial often bore the appearance of severity, as they required to be adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the people.

15. But it was not by compulsory measures alone that Alfred expected to secure the objects of his wishes. He,

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<sup>1</sup> Asser.

who himself possessed no trait of selfishness, knew too well the character of human nature to anticipate so much. To man's ambition and interest did he alike appeal. He rendered the preferments of the church and the high offices of the state open to men of decided talent. And though it is recorded of him that he made a bishop of his benefactor the neatherd, yet, if this really took place, it was doubtless because he knew of no one in his kingdom more efficient for the office; and that he was aware that the peasant might as readily become adapted for the office as those few who ought to have been qualified for it.

16. We must not overlook the efforts made by Alfred to render the vernacular language of the country the medium for conveying the history of the past as well as the elevating effusions of poesy. Bede had written in the fashionable language of the age—Latin.<sup>1</sup> Alfred rendered his important work (the “Ecclesiastical History”) into Saxon for the benefit of his countrymen. The translations of the poetry of Boethius, and of several portions of scripture, were undertaken with a similar view. Thus was the use of Latin discouraged, and the Anglo-Saxon tongue correspondingly exalted. It is important to bear this point in mind; for when we reflect upon the efforts which were subsequently made to entirely efface the Saxon language, it is gratifying to know that the experienced judgment of Alfred had previously discouraged such an idea, and had so early perceived how well the language was adapted to form a vestment for the thoughts of the masters of eloquence, and to become the medium of communication in the business of life. Connected on the one hand with the Celtic, through the Pelasgic stem, the English language yet bears a closer resemblance to the German, from its Teutonic origin. Though not possessing the homogeneousness or euphony of the Greek, or the flexibility of the Latin, the deficiency is perhaps compensated by its capability of receiving foreign terms to represent foreign ideas, and the power which it commands of passionately expressing exalted thought. Alfred earnestly recom-

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1 Although Bede's principal work was written in Latin, he was not unmindful of the necessity of encouraging his mother tongue, and in providing the people with a translation of that best of books, the Bible, in their own native language. His last moments were spent in finishing the translation of St. John's gospel into the vernacular.



mended the translation of "useful books into the Saxon language, so that all the youth of England, but more especially those who were of gentle kind and at ease in their circumstances, may be grounded in letters; for," he observes, "they cannot profit in any pursuit until they are well able to read English."<sup>1</sup> "Let those learn Latin afterwards, who will know more, and advance to a higher position."<sup>2</sup> How appropriate is this advice even to Englishmen of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

17. Whilst Alfred was laying the foundation of Anglo-Saxon learning, he was at the same time not unmindful of mechanics, agriculture, and the fine arts. Manufactures were improved, agricultural operations encouraged, and the building of monasteries, cities, and castles prosecuted with extreme vigour. Asser informs us that although suffering from bodily infirmity he duly performed the functions of government, and exercised himself in the pleasures of the chase. Although his attention was distracted by the invasions of his enemies, he, nevertheless, found time to instruct his artificers, falconers, and dog-keepers; he directed the building of houses upon new mechanical principles; he found time to recite, to learn, to teach, and to attend to his religious duties, both in private and in public. Whilst securing the gratitude and admiration of succeeding ages by his battles, his studies, and his extraordinary foresight, he also stands pre-eminent as the founder of the British navy, as we have before observed. Turn our eyes in whatsoever direction we may, they cannot but be dazzled with the splendour of his achievements.

18. And yet Asser informs us that Alfred "was pricked with many nails of tribulation, though placed in the royal seat," alluding to his bodily sufferings, which according to the ancient chroniclers must have been very severe. From his twentieth to his fortieth year he was afflicted with what

<sup>1</sup> Extract from a letter addressed by Alfred to his bishops, as quoted by Palgrave, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> A portion of the same letter, as quoted by Craik.

<sup>3</sup> The accomplished scholar, Locke, "considers language and philosophy as rather having a tendency to render youth unfit for the actual business of life. He thought that no one should waste their time in attempting to learn the Latin language but such who were intended for the learned professions or the higher position of a gentleman."

Asser calls an "unknown disease," but what William of Malmesbury interprets to have been the piles. His sufferings, we are told, were according to his own request—he having made supplication to God to be afflicted with some disease to keep his body in subjection; and from it we are told he never enjoyed a moment's rest.<sup>1</sup> Whilst therefore our admiration would be excited at the remembrance of such deeds as those of Alfred, performed by a man possessed of an iron constitution, it cannot but be greatly enhanced by the consideration of his bodily sufferings. Racked with incessant pain, yet calmly pursuing his studies, for the benefit of his subjects rather than for his own gratification; subduing the irritability that disease engenders, and rendering himself serviceable to all, he seems to have almost attained perfection.

20. But the question arises, how was it possible for him to perform the actions ascribed to him? The great secret is discoverable in the phrase—economy of time. With Alfred not only were there no idle moments, but there was no misspent time. His work was not only done, but it was done orderly. He had a time for everything, and everything was done in its time. The twenty-four hours of the day were divided into three equal parts, viz., eight to be employed in writing, reading, and prayer; eight in the refreshment of his body, and eight in public business.<sup>2</sup> One exercise was not allowed to intrench upon another, but each had its appointed period. In order to make a satisfactory division of his time, at a period when there were no clocks and watches, he caused candles to be made whereby he might measure it exactly. Six of these candles burned the twenty four hours, and in order to prevent the wind from affecting their combustion he invented lanterns. The activity of his mind was, indeed, ceaseless.

21. Alfred was equally minute in other particulars. His revenue was divided into two parts. The first of these parts had a threefold subdivision; one third of it was to be paid to his ministers and soldiers, a second third to skilled artizans

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<sup>1</sup> Asser.—W. of Malms. Chron.

<sup>2</sup> William of Malmesbury's Chronicle.—Asser, with less exactness, says that he divided his time into two equal parts, the one of which he devoted to the service of God

who were re-embellishing the different buildings of his kingdom, and the remaining third to foreigners who resorted to his court. The second of the two great divisions of his revenues had a fourfold distribution; one part was allotted to the poor, a second part to the two monasteries he had built, a third part to the school he had established, and a fourth part to the neighbouring monasteries and churches, and servants of God in other parts.<sup>1</sup> His attendants too were divided into three companies, each company having to serve at court a month in turn.<sup>2</sup>

22. Alfred also commended himself to the gratitude of his countrymen by successfully using his influence in getting a repeal of the taxes paid to the pope by the English school at Rome. London, which had suffered much from the hostile attacks of the Danes, was rebuilt by him, and edifices, noble for the times, sprung up on every side. His laws were so stringent that bracelets could safely be hung by the wayside,<sup>3</sup> and yet there was so great a degree of kindness mingled with this firmness that the people loved and revered him. His piety too was equal to his bravery and political sagacity. A Psalter, or some other good book, was his constant companion. The slumbers of night were often disturbed by his meditations, for often, we are told, would he arise at midnight and repair to the chapel and engage in holy exercises.<sup>4</sup> His seemed to be a life spent for the good of his subjects, and as a preparation for eternity.

23. Alfred's fame as a legislator rests rather upon his collection of subsisting laws, and reducing them to a system, than in the framing of new ones. He was not unequal to the task, however, for we are not without specimens whereby to judge of his ability in this particular. To him has been ascribed the honour of instituting trial by jury—one of the great elements of English liberty. This, however, was the growth of a later age. In his time all crimes, even that of murder itself, were punishable by fines. Although we can

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1 Asser.—William of Malmesbury says that he devoted one half of his revenues to his monasteries, and divided the other half into two equal portions, one part of which was given to his servants, artificers, and strangers, and the other part to the poor, the monasteries, the scholars, and the foreign churches.

2 Ibid.

3 William of Malmesbury's Chronicle.—Roger of Wendover.

4 Asser.



hardly reconcile his system of punishments to our modern notions, yet we must own that there has latterly existed a growing inclination to moderate the character of punishment for crimes, and thus more nearly to assimilate our laws to those of the time of Alfred. So great is the revolution in opinion which a few years produce!

24. Although the popular notion that Alfred divided England into counties is now almost exploded, and the more rational opinion received, viz., "that these divisions of the country were a work of time, and not the creation of the absolute fancies of an individual" accepted, yet to Alfred must be ascribed the honour of dividing the people into hundreds and tithings for the better security of property.<sup>1</sup> The story of the bracelets, before alluded to, affords a happy illustration of the effect of Alfred's new arrangements. The just administration of the laws was a subject in which Alfred was very exact. We learn from Asser that he was a most acute investigator into the examination of a criminal. That he enquired into almost all the judgments delivered in his absence, and that he severely reprimanded those judges whose decisions were unjust. Thus were the laws, such as they were, administered during the latter part of his reign with vigour and impartiality.

25. Before taking leave of the reign of Alfred we must notice his writings. They consist almost entirely of translations; and yet we are scarcely correct in calling them so, we should rather regard them as paraphrases, or even commentaries.<sup>2</sup> His chief motive in assuming the character of

1 Ingulph.—Malmesbury.

2 The following specimen of Alfred's translation of Boethius will give a fair view of his style and mode of proceeding:

BOETHIUS LITERALLY TRANSLATED.—"Does the brightness of gems attract your eyes? But the chief part of the splendour with them is the light itself of the jewels, not of the men; which indeed I wonder that any should so vehemently admire: for what is there in that which wants the motion of the soul, and the combination of limbs; which can seem by right to be beautiful to animate and rational nature? Although they are the works of the Creator, and by this distinction attract something of the final beauty, yet placed below your excellence, they by no means deserve your admiration."—Lib. ii, p. 5.

ALFRED'S TRANSLATION.—Why should the beauty of gems draw your eyes to them to wonder at them, as I know they do? What is then the nobility of that beauty which is in gems? It is theirs, not yours. At this I am most exceedingly astonished, why you should think this irrational, created good, better than your own excellence; why should you so exceedingly admire these gems, or any of those dead-like things that have not reason; because they can, by no right, deserve that

author was his desire to reduce to the vernacular language those works of his own and foreign countries which he deemed most advantageous to his people. Although not aspiring to the dignity of eloquence, in the modern acceptation of the term, yet his writings are distinguished by heartiness, quaintness,<sup>1</sup> and simplicity. They may be thus enumerated:—

1.—His Handbook, or Manual, which contained prayers, psalms, and quotations, said by Asser to have been as large as a Psalter.

2.—His translation of Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophica*, the object of which was to show the vanity of riches, power, dignity, and pleasure.

3.—A Preface to the Pastoral of Pope Gregory, which was translated at his command by bishop Werefrith.

4.—A Translation of Orosius. Some parts of this work he compressed, whilst he introduced some important geographical knowledge obtained by recent explorers.

5.—Bede's Ecclesiastical History.

6.—Translations of portions of the Bible.

7.—A translation of the Soliloquies of St. Augustine.

To these have been added Alfred's Proverbs, and a translation of Æsop's Fables.<sup>2</sup>

We cannot better conclude the history of Alfred, perhaps, than by inserting Henry of Huntingdon's poetical tribute to his memory:—

Toilsome thy onward path to high renown,  
Thorny the chaplet that entwin'd thy crown,  
Unconquer'd Alfred! Thine the dauntless mind,  
That in defeat could fresh resources find;  
What though thy hopes were ever dash'd with care,  
Still they were never clouded with despair:  
To-day victorious, future wars were plann'd,  
To-day defeated, future triumphs scann'd.

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you should wonder at them. Though they be God's creatures, they are not to be measured with you, because one of two things occurs; either they are not good for you themselves, or but for a little good compared with you. WE TOO MUCH UNDER-VALUE OURSELVES when we love that which is inferior to us, and in our power, more than ourselves, or the Lord, that has made us and given us all these goods." —As extracted and translated by Sharon Turner *Hist. An. Sax.*, vol. ii, p. 26.

1 Thus, speaking of worldly advantages, he says: "But there, where they be a good, then are they good through the goodness of the good man that doeth good with them, and he is good through God." —*Ibid*, p. 28.

2 *Biograph. Brit.*, lib. ix, S. period.—Haller's *Life of Alfred the Great*, translated by Steinitz.

Thy way-soil'd garments, and thy blood-stain'd sword,  
Sad pictures of the lot of kings afford ;  
Who else, like this, throughout the wide world's space,  
Bore in adversity so brave a face ?  
The sword for ever bare in mortal strife,  
Failed to cut short thy destin'd thread of life.  
Peaceful hy end : may Christ be now thy rest,  
Thine be the crown and sceptre of the blest ! <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henry of Huntingdon's Chronicle, p. 161.



## CHAPTER VII.

FROM THE REIGN OF ALFRED TO THAT OF CANUTE.

1. Derived, as the Latins were, from the great Celtic family, it is natural for us to expect a similarity of customs in the branches of their descendants. Aristocratic pride, monarchical absolutism, and contempt of freedom may be regarded as their characteristics, and thus strikingly do they contrast with the Teutonic people. The Britons had been accustomed to the overwhelming authority of the Druids, and thus their passive obedience was more readily transferred to a military dictator as soon as they were led to perceive the apparent justice and moderation of his government. The specious appearance and flattering attraction of a vice-regal court were too insinuating to be resisted, and the slaves of the British priests were soon found the supplicants for Roman favour. In striking contrast to the British Celts do the German Teutones appear. Passionately cultivating the inherent idea of freedom, the Saxons, at least in England, have persevered until true liberty has been obtained. Without the sudden panting and occasional outbreaks for freedom, peculiar to the Francic people, they steadily strove for, and incessantly yearned after, that which they have at length acquired. In the eloquent words of Mackintosh, "Their opinions were not blindly received from priests, nor was their liberty of action fettered by chiefs. Their souls were raised by taking a free part in concerns more dignified than those of individuals. The energy was awakened, which, after many ages of storm and darkness, qualified the Teutonic race to be the ruling portion of mankind, to lay the foundation of a better-ordered civilization than that of the eastern or of the ancient world, and finally to raise into the fellow-

ship of these blessings the nations whom they had subdued, but with whom they are now undiscernibly mingled.”

2. Having referred to Alfred’s division of the people into hundreds and tithings, for the more effectual execution of the laws, I here present a summary of those institutions. Every man was punished as an outlaw who did not register himself in some tithing; and no man could change his habitation without a warrant or certificate from the borsholder of the tithing to which he formerly belonged. When any person in any tithing or decennary was guilty of a crime, the borsholder was summoned to answer for him; and if he were not willing to be surety for his appearance, and his clearing himself, the criminal was committed to prison, and there detained till his trial; if he fled. either before or after finding sureties, the borsholder and the decennary became liable to inquiry, and were exposed to the penalties of law. Thirty-one days were allowed them for producing the criminal; and if the time elapsed without their being able to find him, the borsholder, with two other members of the decennary, was obliged to appear, and, together with three chief members of three neighbouring decennaries, (making twelve in all) to swear that his decennary was free from all privity, both of the crime committed and of the escape of the criminal. If the borsholder could not find such a number to answer for his innocence, the decennary was compelled by fine to make satisfaction to the king, according to the degree of the offence.”<sup>1</sup> It has been denied that Alfred was the author of these regulations. “He did not,” says Thierry, “properly speaking, institute this organization into districts, comprising ten or a hundred families, nor the municipal officers named tithing-men and hundred-men, nor even the mode of trial, which the influence of time has modified, and which gave rise to trial by jury; all these institutions existed among the Saxons and Angles prior to their immigration into Britain.”<sup>2</sup> If Alfred was not the originator of all these judicial matters, he certainly was the improver of all such, and as certainly many of them took their rise from him.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Hume’s Hist. of England.

2 Thierry’s Conquest of England.

3 See Turner’s Hist. Anglo-Saxon, vol. iii, lib. v, c. 6.

One such character as that of Alfred embellishes the age in which he lives, and exalts the dignity of human nature.

2. If the efforts of Alfred to promote the education of the people led us to hope that a bright era had arrived for learning and literature, we must be prepared to witness our hopes again eclipsed by the darksome shadows of a lengthened cloud. The almost supernatural energy of Alfred had scarcely ceased, by his early death, when Saxon ignorance again returned. The sword could not be sheathed, the temple of Janus could not be closed, whilst the hordes of Danish freebooters were abroad upon the earth. Incessant fatigue, gloomy apprehensions, civil dissensions, and family troubles, must yet bring successive Saxon monarchs to an early grave, ere the star of learning should be again in the ascendant.

3. Short reigns are at all times unfavourable to social improvements, and particularly so where much is dependent upon the monarch. Especially is this the case with an infant state but just emerging from barbarism. Military organization then demands supreme attention, not only to encounter hostile forces from without, but also to subdue internal quarrels, and check the insidious or open steps of some aspirant to the throne. Social improvements are not the work of an hour, they must grow with the growth of the state in which they take their rise to produce permanently beneficial results. We can clearly perceive an illustration of the above general propositions, by examining the history of the reigns of the successors of Alfred. Within the space of two generations thirteen kings were successively seated upon the English throne. During this time the Danes repeatedly devastated the country and excited a general ferment. Vigorous Saxon princes were wholly occupied in providing means for contending with them; whilst the revenues of the kingdom, under weak-minded princes, were absorbed by the priests for a similar purpose. Should the thought of instructing the people, according to Alfred's notions, have ever occurred to any of these kings, their reigns were too full of external troubles, or too short to enable them to carry out their projected schemes. The priests, who were the sole professors of what learning existed, were too much engrossed in selfish ambition, in securing to



themselves and their order large landed possessions, and in inculcating their papal monstrosities, to attempt to circulate what was then generally deemed a useless commodity. The blessings of general education were to be slowly perceived; the soil was to be prepared ere the seeds were to be generally sown, that their fruits might be the more lasting.

4. Yet in that age, as well as in every other, there was of course *education*—education in contradistinction to mere instruction. Education, indeed, there must be in every condition of life, whatever may be its character. But in the monasteries, where alone book learning flourished, there was practical training—a drawing out of the hidden man, as will presently be shown. What we lament is the limitation of these advantages to a few favoured districts, and a few noble personages; the character of the information doled out; the immense amount of superstition accompanying it; and the imperfect manner of securing its reproduction. The superstitions and corruptions which soon overshadowed the minds of both the instructors and the taught,—the want of energy which soon became visible in the few who had opportunities for improvement, as well as amongst the teachers themselves; and the monopoly of such inestimable general blessings are now too apparent. Here is perceived a flame ignited by a spark from Minerva's altar, and straightway its dazzling lustre beams through the hazy world, to be extinguished, at least for a time, by a depressing general ignorance. Such a one was Bede, and Alfred, and Alfrie.

5. Upon the death of Alfred, in the year A.D. 901, Edward the elder, or Eadweard, as he is sometimes called, succeeded to the throne. Had the law of hereditary succession been strictly adhered to, Edward would not have been king, for there lived at that time Ethelwald, the son of Ethelred, an elder brother of Alfred. Although prudential considerations induced the people to lay aside his claim in favour of his uncle Alfred (Ethelwald being at that time too young to take upon himself the government of the kingdom, and Alfred doubtless unwilling to act the true part of regent for him, especially as he had been appointed to succeed his father Ethelwulf,) yet the same reasons could not be adduced now. At any rate, Ethelwald seemed determined to dispute his cousin-german's claim to the throne, and a civil war

ensued. The remembrance of the deeds of Alfred inclined the most influential of the Saxon nobles to support the claims of Edward, whilst the unsettled and Danish portion of the population, ever ready to support any demonstration against the government of the day, sided with Ethelwald. Ethelwald retired to the castle at Wimborne, and swore that he would perish ere he would desert it; but upon the arrival of the forces of Edward in the neighbourhood, he fled to Northumbria, and afterwards left the kingdom. He now attached himself to a band of pirates, and invaded his native country. Joined by the discontented East Anglians, he was a match for Edward, and for a time the contest between the two was nearly equal. In the year 905, however, Ethelwald fell, and the conspiracy was broken up.<sup>1</sup>

6. Edward had now less to distract his attention, and could he but have annihilated his tormentors the Danes, he would not have realised so forcibly the poet's conviction,

“Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.”

The successive invasions of these enemies, however, gave him not a moment's rest. Like his father he strengthened his navy, finding therein the true defence of his country; but other precautions were not neglected. His army was ever ready for active service, and his subjects were employed in strengthening the defences of their country. The people seem to have been imbued with patriotic ardour. Towns were fortified and the enemy often attacked and defeated by the citizens alone.

7. In his contests with the Danes he was much indebted to the prudence and valour of his sister Ethelfleda, who seems to have been united with her husband in the joint sovereignty of the Mercians. Her exploits against the pagans and against the Welsh, her energy in repairing or building towns, and especially in constructing fortifications, were fertile subjects for the ancient chroniclers.<sup>2</sup> She died about five years before her brother, and was buried at St. Peter's, Gloucester.<sup>3</sup>

8. Like Alfred, Edward possessed a true military spirit

<sup>1</sup> A. S. Chron., Hy. of Hun., Roger of Wen., Wm. of Malm.

<sup>2</sup> A. S. Chron., Wm. of Malm., Ingulph, Roger of Wen.

<sup>3</sup> Wm. of Malm.

which was eminently conspicuous in his contests with the Danes. Though inferior to his father in intellectual qualifications, he was his superior in the power which he wielded.<sup>1</sup> Although he earned deserved praise for his military transactions, yet his deeds did not eclipse the renown of his father, who laid the foundation for his greatness.<sup>2</sup> He reduced Essex, East Anglia, Mercia, Northumbria, Cumberland, Galloway, and Wales, to a comparative state of subjection, and compelled the king of Scotland to acknowledge his supremacy.<sup>3</sup> He had a numerous family. By Egwina, a concubine, he had Athelstan and a daughter. By Elfreda, Ethelwald, Edwin, and six daughters, viz., Eafleda, and Ethelhilda, who vowed celibacy to God; Edgitha, who was given in marriage to Charles the Simple, of France; Ethilda, who was married to the father of Hugh Capet; Edgitha, who was married to Otho, son of the emperor of Germany, and Elgifa, given in marriage to a certain duke near the Alps.<sup>4</sup> By a third wife, Edgiva, he had Edmund and Edred, and two daughters, Eadburga and Edgiva.<sup>5</sup> Having fallen under the pope's displeasure, for not appointing bishops over the West Saxons, he convened a council in the year 904, over which Plegmund, archbishop of Canterbury, presided, and appointed five new bishops. Plegmund was sent to Rome with presents, to announce the decision arrived at, and the Roman pontiff's favour was again secured.

9. Edward appears to have been anxious to improve the intellectual state of his people, and doubtless would have made greater efforts than he did, had the state of his kingdom permitted. It has been asserted that he founded the university of Cambridge, though with what probability it is impossible to say. He might have extended his patronage to a school in that neighbourhood, as his father had done towards a school at Oxford, though there seems no probability that his claim to such honour will ever be established. This we do know, that he had his own children carefully instructed. William of Malmesbury observes: "Edward

1 Wm. of Malm., Ingulph, Roger of Wen., Hoveden.

2 William of Malmesbury.

3 A. S. Chron., Wm. of Malm., Ingulph, Roger of Wendover.

4 Ingulph says she was given in marriage to a nobleman of high rank in the palace of the emperor of Germany.

5 William of Malmesbury.



had brought up his daughters in such wise that in childhood they gave their whole attention to literature, and afterwards employed themselves in the labours of the distaff and the needle, that thus they might chastely pass their virgin age. His sons were so educated, as, first, to have the completest benefit of learning, that afterwards they might succeed to govern the state, not like rustics, but philosophers."<sup>1</sup> In this passage we have one of the earliest references to the needlework of the Anglo Saxons, which afterwards became so famous.<sup>2</sup> Edward died in the year 924, and was buried at Winchester.

#### ÆTHELSTAN.

10. Athelstan, or Ethelstan as he is sometimes called, succeeded his father Edward, by the election of the nobles, at the age of thirty. Tradition ascribes a low parentage to him on his mother's side, asserting that she was a shepherd's daughter, and never became the wife of Edward.<sup>3</sup> William of Malmesbury, however, speaks of the story he relates from tradition very doubtfully. The beginning of Athelstan's reign was disturbed by the sedition of a nobleman named Elfred, or Alfred, whose designs becoming known he was sent to the Roman court to defend himself upon oath before the pope. Having attempted to do so before the altar of St. Peter, he fell instantly down, and expired in the English school three days afterwards.<sup>4</sup> Athelstan soon had his attention directed to the kingdom of Northumberland. Having given a sister of his in marriage to Sihtric, its monarch, a firm alliance was established between them. Sihtric, however, died the following year, when Athelstan took possession of the kingdom. Anlaf and Guthferth, the sons of Sihtric by a former wife, now fled, the former to Scotland and the latter to Ireland.<sup>5</sup> The king of the Scots was now forced to acknowledge the superiority of Athelstan, and the Welsh princes were compelled to pay him a heavy

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<sup>1</sup> William of Malmesbury's Chron., p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> See Lives of the Queens of England, vol. i.

<sup>3</sup> Wm. of Malmesbury's Chron., lib. ii, c. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Roger of Wendover, Hume.

tribute. The Britons of the south of England were driven farther into Cornwall, and the Danish pirates overawed by his prowess. In the year 937 his last great battle was fought. Anlaf, the son of Sihtric, having returned to England with a large fleet and army, and being joined by Constantine, king of the Scots, and the inhabitants of Northumberland, was met by the forces of Athelstan at Brunanburg, or Brumby, and there suffered a severe defeat.<sup>1</sup> We learn from William of Malmesbury that Anlaf entered the camp of Athelstan as a minstrel, but having been recognised by a deserter from his army, Athelstan received timely information of his visit, and was thus prepared to baffle any intentions he might have formed from his unsuccessful disguise. The battle of Brunanburg forms the subject of an ode in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

11. The reign of Athelstan was blackened by one imputed crime, of which, however, we would willingly believe he was not guilty. It appears from some of the ancient historians<sup>2</sup> that Athelstan was jealous of his brother Edwin, whose legitimate birth gave him great uneasiness. He had also been informed by his cup-bearer that his brother was acting treacherously towards him. To relieve himself from this source of trouble, he ordered him to be drowned. Edwin was accordingly sent to sea in an open boat, with a single attendant; but soon becoming weary of his life, committed himself to the waves and perished. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, however, simply mentions the fact that Edwin was drowned, whilst Henry of Huntingdon says that "by a stroke of adverse fortune Athelstan lost his brother Edwin, the Etheling, a young prince of great energy and high promise, who was unhappily drowned in the sea."<sup>3</sup>

12. Athelstan had a short but brilliant reign of sixteen years. During this time he so raised the character of his country that foreign princes sought his alliance. The emperor of Germany begged his sister as a wife for his son Otho.<sup>4</sup> The new duke of Normandy, Rollo, entered into an

1 A. S. Chron., Wm. of Malm., Hoveden, Ingulph.

2 Wm. of Malm., Roger of Wen., Hoveden.

3 Lib. v.

4 Wm. of Malm., lib. ii, c. 6.

alliance with him, and assisted him with his forces.<sup>1</sup> The presents sent to him when his fourth sister was demanded in marriage were of the most costly description.<sup>2</sup> Athelstan has indeed been named the first king of all England.<sup>3</sup> His reign was less disturbed by the Danish invasions than that of many of his predecessors. This may partly be accounted for by reflecting upon the occupations of the Danes at this period. Rollo was engaged in his dukedom of Normandy. Thither the superfluous population of the Danes directed their efforts; for we are informed that when Rollo was hardly pressed by his enemies, the Danes, at his invitation came to his assistance.<sup>4</sup> The Danes were also prevented from attacking England from a consideration of the kind of reception they had previously met with from the vigorous efforts of Alfred and his son Edward, as well as from the known character of Athelstan. Rollo's alliance with him would also tend to render them more cautious.

14. Athelstan was not unmindful of the social condition of his country. To improve commerce he passed a law, awarding the rank of thane, or nobleman, to any one who should make three successful voyages on his own account.<sup>5</sup> His private resources were not squandered away in luxury, nor lavishly heaped upon the undeserving, and yet they were all spent. He built two new monasteries, we are informed, one at Middleton, and the other at Muchelney, and richly endowed them. Besides these, there were few of the old monasteries in England that did not experience benefit from his liberality.<sup>7</sup> He was a worthy descendant of the great Alfred, not only in his personal bravery and prudent government, but also in his mental capacity. Having been educated in the court of his Aunt Ethelfleda, he was distinguished by the lustre of his qualities; and we are assured by William of Malmesbury that he was versed in literature. So high was the esteem in which his court was held for learning, that Haco, the son of the Norwegian

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1 Turner's Hist. of Eng., vol. i, p. 58. - Roger of Wendover.

2 Wm. of Malm., lib. ii, c. 6.

3 Thierry's Norman Conquest, lib. ii, p. 26.

4 Turner's Hist. of Eng., vol. iii, c. iii, p. 64.

5 Hume.

6 Roger of Wendover.

7 William of Malmesbury, Ingulph.



monarch, was sent here to be educated.<sup>1</sup> He appears to have had an extensive library, some of the MSS. of which might have been seen at Bath at the time of the Reformation. A MS. of the Gospels presented to the cathedral of Canterbury by him, is still preserved. Like his grandfather Alfred, he encouraged the translation of the scriptures into his native language.<sup>2</sup> He was beloved by his subjects, respected by the sovereigns of Europe, and feared by his enemies; and his loss was the more severely lamented through the imbecility of the sovereigns who succeeded him.

## EDMUND.

15. Edmund, the brother of Athelstan, ascended the throne in the year 940, at the age of eighteen, having previously buried his brother with great pomp. In the following year he marched into Cumberland, and having ravaged it, granted it to Malcolm, king of Scotland, for the very obliging reason that he could not undertake to keep it in subjection himself.<sup>3</sup> In the early part of his reign he admitted Dunstan to his counsels, a man of great ambition, lofty intellect, and of noble family; but having been subsequently informed by his nobles of some peculating faults in Dunstan's character, he deprived him of his honours. A circumstance occurred on the following day, however, most fortunate for the disgraced priest. Whilst the king was engaged in hunting, the deer they were pursuing leapt over an immense precipice, and, with the dogs that were following it, was killed. The king, perceiving his danger, attempted in vain to hold in his horse. Seeing no hope of escape, he exclaimed, "I give thee thanks, Lord Jesus Christ, that at this time I do not remember having injured any one but Dunstan only, and this fault I will with ready zeal amend by a hearty reconciliation, if thou only grant me time."<sup>4</sup> Upon which the horse stood and the king was saved. Dunstan was consequently restored to favour and made abbot of Glastonbury.<sup>5</sup> The abbey itself was greatly en-

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1 Hist. of England, Gleig.

2 Popular Hist. of England.

3 A. S. Chron., Hy. of Huntingdon.

4 Roger of Wendover's Chronicle, p. 250.

5 Ibid.

riched by the bounty of the king, and a charter granted to it, one of the most important clauses of which secured its exemption from the impositions of the king's officers.<sup>1</sup> Edmund did not long survive this. Being present at a grand entertainment of his nobles at Pucklechurch, he discovered amongst the assembled guests a robber, named Leolf, whom he had previously banished the kingdom. He ordered the fellow to leave the room, and upon his refusing to obey, Edmund rushed upon him to remove him by main force, when a concealed dagger was thrust into the king's body by the villain, which caused his immediate death. He left a son named Edgar, who afterwards ascended the throne.<sup>2</sup>

#### EDRED.

18. There were children of Edmund living at the time when Edred, the son of Edward the elder, and brother of the two last kings, was crowned. But they were minors, and at that early period of our national history, a firm government could alone be expected to allay internal troubles, or defeat external enemies. The sovereignty was at this early period partly elective. Alfred, Athelstan, Edmund, and Edred, were irregular sovereigns, and obtained possession of the throne by the suffrages of the nobles, or by their own determined character. The troubles of Edred commenced with his accession to the throne. The Northumbrian Danes, ever intent upon rebelling against the authority of the West Saxon kings, renounced his authority. Edred lost no time in quelling the disturbance, and, further, marching into Scotland, compelled its king to do him homage. Two years scarcely elapsed ere these troublesome Northmen again hoisted the standard of independence. Eric, the son of Harold, who had been appointed king of Northumbria by Athelstan,<sup>3</sup> returned to England and was again proclaimed king. Edred sent his chancellor, Turketul, to Wulfstan, archbishop of York, who was suspected of favouring the designs of the Northumbrian, to exhort him

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<sup>1</sup> William of Malmesbury.

<sup>2</sup> Hoveden.

<sup>3</sup> A. S. Chron., sub. an. 949, Roger of Wendover, Thierry's Norman Conquest, p. 28.

to remain faithful to Edred.<sup>1</sup> In his journey to Northumbria the chancellor was entertained by the monks of Croyland, though in the most miserable manner, in consequence of their poverty. When upon his return he had made known to Edred the results of his journey towards the north, he represented to him the distressed state of the monastery at Croyland. After some amount of difficulty he procured the abbacy for himself, and endowed it with six of the sixty rich manors he possessed, giving the remainder of them to the king.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile Edred marched into Northumbria, again quieted the country, and was returning when he was suddenly attacked by some Yorkshire forces in his rear. He engaged and defeated them, and would have returned and further devastated their country had not the now distressed Northumbrians tendered their submission.<sup>3</sup> In the following year (949) he was again deprived of the Northumbrian sovereignty by a certain Anlaf Curran, and after him by Eric, both of whom had previously been invested with kingly power there; and it was not until the year 954 that he was again invited to assume the sovereignty of the country.<sup>4</sup>

19. During this reign Dunstan began to bring himself into notoriety by the measures which he adopted to increase the power of the church in England. He introduced the rules of the Benedictine order of monks, and endeavoured to enforce their due observance. To impress the people with an exalted idea of his own sanctity was an object of his solicitude, perceiving that thereby the royal road to preferment would be open to him. Edred delivered into his hands the custody of his treasures, as well as of his conscience,<sup>5</sup> which were turned to the best account for the accomplishment of his own schemes by the astute and ambitious churchman.

20. If Edred did not possess military qualities equal to his predecessors, he, at least, secured the respect of the

1 Wulfstan was afterwards, in the year 951, deprived of his archbishopric, and kept in chains for a period of two years, when he was released from prison and made bishop of Dorchester.—Roger of Wen., Wm. of Malm.

2 Ingulph.—See also Roger of Wendover.

3 A. S. Chron., Wm. of Malm., Ingulph, Roger of Wen., Hy. of Hunt.

4 Ibid.

5 Roger of Wendover.



clergy and monks by his liberal donations to members of their order. "He devoted his life to God, and to Dunstan," remarks William of Malmesbury; and if founding and restoring monasteries entitle him to such honour he certainly earned it.<sup>1</sup> Finding his death approaching, he sent for his confessor Dunstan, but before he could reach Frome, where the king lay, Edred expired. His palace is said to have been the school of virtue.<sup>2</sup>

#### EDWY.

21. The death of Edred paved the way for the elevation of the sons of Edmund to the throne. Edwy, though not more than sixteen or seventeen years of age at the death of his uncle, was crowned king by archbishop Odo, at Kingston, in the year 955. Being involved in a contest with the monks, and especially with Dunstan, at the commencement of his reign, and his biographers being monks, we have the greatest difficulty in estimating his true character. By most of the old chroniclers he is represented as the most wanton of youths.<sup>3</sup> From the previous remarks, however, we are inclined to doubt the truthfulness of the serious charges alleged against him. Roger of Wendover accuses him of having had improper connexion with a certain lady of noble birth, and her mother. Yet we have positive evidence of his marriage with the daughter, and no grounds for believing that there was otherwise than a proper degree of maternal affection manifested towards him from the latter.<sup>4</sup> At his coronation the young Edwy left the carousals of the nobility and clergy at an early hour, and retired to join the more congenial society of his wife and her mother; upon which the revellers whom he had left felt indignant, and Dunstan was despatched, or went of his own accord, to fetch the young king back. This was forcibly done, and the insult thus offered to royalty by an arrogant churchman could not easily be forgotten.<sup>5</sup> Dunstan was accused of unfaithfulness in his office of treasurer to the late king, and was banished

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1 Ingulph.

2 William of Malmesbury.

3 William of Malmesbury, Roger of Wendover.

4 Knight's Popular Hist. of England, vol. i, p. 134.

5 Wm. of Malmesbury, Roger of Wendover.

the kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Otho, the archbishop of Canterbury, and the faction that acted with him, soon excited a popular insurrection in the kingdom of Mercia, and Edgar, his brother, was elected king of the district north of the Thames. Otho at length separated Edwy and his wife Elgiva,<sup>2</sup> on the plea of his having violated the laws of consanguinity. Elgiva's face was then brutally seared with a red hot iron. She was banished from the kingdom, and upon her endeavouring to return was waylaid at Gloucester, had the sinews of her legs divided, and died in a few days in great agony.<sup>3</sup> Edwy did not long survive her, having been probably murdered in the year 958, after a short and inglorious reign of four years.

22. It is satisfactory to find that one respectable historian, at least, rescues the name of Edwy from the opprobrium which has attached to it. Henry of Huntingdon says, "This king wore the diadem not unworthily; but after a prosperous and becoming commencement of his reign, its happy promise was cut short by a premature death."

#### EDGAR, THE PACIFIC.

23. We now approach the reign of the second son of Edmund. We cannot but regard the death of the youthful Edwy as highly suspicious. We will not suspect Edgar, however, as being the author or accomplice of the crime; for we have abundant grounds for believing that Edwy was surrounded with implacable and unscrupulous churchmen who would willingly have offered a pardon to any one who might have murdered him. Yet we cannot believe that he regretted his brother's loss, nor can we admire his conduct either in becoming the instrument in the dismemberment of his brother's kingdom, or in receiving the bitter enemies of his brother into his most cordial favour. But we must bear in mind that he was but a boy, having acquired the undivided sovereignty of England at the early age of sixteen. Raised by the monks to kingly dignity in his brother's lifetime, he never forgot the services rendered by them:

1 A. S. Chron., Wm, of Malmesbury.

2 A. S. Chron., Roger of Wendover.

3 Hume, on the authority of Osborne and Gervase.

24. Edgar has been styled "the Peaceable," and certainly his reign was less disturbed by foreign enemies and intestine commotions than any former reign had been. The Danes, as we have already remarked, were engaged in the permanent settlement of Normandy, and had consequently less inducement to visit England; and even had such a desire existed, the politic measures taken by Edgar, doubtless under the advice of Dunstan, would have rendered the execution of their design more hazardous than desirable. The people, too, were more united, resources were more abundant, and the means of defence better calculated to ward off an attack of pirates than ever previously had been the case. The English navy had been rapidly increased in strength since the time of Alfred, Edgar had consequently a most powerful fleet at his command, which was constantly in course of training, and continually on the look-out for an enemy. The old historians have doubtless exaggerated the number of vessels in commission, three thousand six hundred being one of the lowest stated numbers.<sup>1</sup> After making due allowance we, however, can readily believe that he had a large number of well equipped ships.

25. Ascending the throne in the year 959, we are yet informed that he was not crowned till the year 973.<sup>2</sup> This is partly accounted for by the old historians from the fact that he had many years of penance to submit to for his enormous crimes. Thus, he carried off a nun,<sup>3</sup> and was compelled to do seven year's penance for it. He murdered a nobleman, named Athelwolf, to marry his widow; and looking lustfully upon the daughter of another, was only prevented from carrying out his design against her by maternal care and trickery.<sup>4</sup> And yet, notwithstanding these crimes, his character was most highly eulogized by the ancient chroniclers, and his wickedness lightly referred to. The partiality of the historians for Edgar, however, is readily accounted for: he was the friend of the church, and to *churchmen* are we indebted for what knowledge we possess of him. This single passage from William of Malmesbury

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<sup>1</sup> Hoveden.

<sup>2</sup> Roger of Wendover.

<sup>3</sup> Malmesbury denies that his victim was a nun.

<sup>4</sup> See Wm. of Malmesbury.



fully explains the secret: "Scarcely does a year elapse in the chronicles in which he did not perform something great and advantageous to his country; in which he did not build some new monastery." This was, indeed, the age of monasteries. Ordericus Vitalis says that Edgar founded twenty-six new monasteries, and Ingulph that he restored more than forty-eight. His liberal benefactions to these monkish habitations would have been alone sufficient to secure for him the favourable opinion of their inmates. But this was not all. He lent his aid to Dunstan to exterminate the secular clergy from the monasteries, (i. e., those who were either married or refused to separate from their wives) and to enforce the strict rules of celibacy. In one word, he was the tool of the priests, and for his co-operation with them in their designs he received their good opinion and support. Dunstan was made bishop of Worcester, then of London, and lastly archbishop of Canterbury, by him, and was thus bound to him by the ties of gratitude as well as policy.

26. Edgar was a powerful prince. He subdued the inhabitants of different parts of Britain by the mere terror of his name, and inspired his foreign enemies with fear by the reports spread of his prowess.<sup>1</sup> Saxons, Flemings, and Danes visited and entered into an alliance with the powerful Edgar, though the historians complain that their arrival corrupted the natives.<sup>2</sup> Although but small of stature, he is represented as overawing more powerfully built men, no one daring to meet him in single combat.<sup>3</sup> Upon one occasion, we are informed, that he summoned his tributary princes to Chester, when eight of them rowed him in a boat on the river Dee.<sup>4</sup> His laws were respected, yet it was the punishment attending the breaking of them that caused them to be so. "Edgar's laws for the punishment of offenders were horribly severe. The eyes were put out, nostrils slit, ears torn off, hands and feet cut off, and finally, after the scalp had been torn off, the miserable wretches were left exposed to beasts of prey."<sup>5</sup> Yet he was careful

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1 Wm. of Malmesbury, Hy. of Huntingdon.

2 Ibid.

3 Wm. of Malmesbury.

4 Wm. of Malm., Hy. of Hunt., Roger of Wen., Hoveden.

5 Note to Bohn's edition of Wm. of Malmesbury's Chronicle, p. 158. The editor's authority for the note is V. Acta. Sanctor, Jub. 2, in Vita Sioythuni.

that justice should not be abused. To this end he visited the different parts of his kingdom in person, that he might ascertain that the poor were not oppressed by the rich, but that equal justice was administered to all.<sup>1</sup> William of Malmesbury absurdly asks, How it could be supposed that he would pass over the crimes of men, when he was determined to destroy all the beasts of prey in his kingdom, and commanded the king of the Welsh to pay him a tribute of three hundred wolves' heads yearly, instead of his former tribute.

27. Although the vices of Edgar were neither few in number, nor trifling in character; although the means adopted to secure the crown, and to preserve honesty in his acquired dominions, were not of the most exemplary character; although his unreserved obedience to the dictates of the monks militates against his character as a great and independent sovereign, yet we are compelled to regard him as one of the most powerful of the Anglo-Saxon monarchs. If we have no record of his attention to the intellectual improvement of the people, we yet know that he provided those places where learning alone flourished for many centuries afterwards, and without which what little we know of our own ancestors would probably have been buried in oblivion. We are assured that Edgar was the patron of the liberal arts,<sup>2</sup> and this we can readily understand from the attention he paid to the erection of monasteries. We know that learned men met with the encouragement they deserved, (which is rarely the case in modern times) and we are informed of one man, Abbo, who was sent for from France to become a teacher in England.<sup>3</sup> After a reign of sixteen years, Edgar died, and was buried at Glastonbury in the year 975.

#### EDWARD.

28. The fruits of the policy and wickedness of Edgar soon made their appearance. The student of history derives satisfaction in discovering the justice as well as wisdom

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<sup>1</sup> Roger of Wendover.

<sup>2</sup> Wm. of Malmesbury.

<sup>3</sup> Ordericus Vitalis.

displayed by God in his terrestrial government. Nations, as well as individuals, cannot prosecute a sinful course unscathed. The arm of vengeance overtakes the guilty with a fearful retribution. Could we be permitted to read the inward thoughts and feelings of Edgar, as we have an opportunity of studying his outward actions, we should doubtless discover from his guilt-stricken conscience, from the humiliation which he often felt at his prostration at the feet of the monks, a verification of the precept, "Though hand join in hand the wicked shall not go unpunished." But we will depart from the region of surmise and enter the district of fact, and there witness a nation's degradation through a nation's folly.

29. Edgar, as we have before related, murdered a nobleman to marry his wife. We have an almost parallel case recorded in the Bible. The man after God's own heart took the poor man's lamb,—the issue of his guilt was the cause of the dismemberment of his kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Such was the result too of Edgar's wickedness. Edgar died, and forthwith there was a commotion in the kingdom regarding a successor to his dignity. Edgar had directed in his will that the sovereignty should devolve upon Edward. He was his eldest surviving son, and was better fitted by his years for the government of a kingdom (although but fifteen years of age at the death of his father) than was Ethelred under the regency of the ambitious Elfrida. So thought Dunstan and his party, and notwithstanding the intrigues of the queen-mother Edward was crowned king.<sup>2</sup>

30. It has been before mentioned that the secular canons were dismissed from their monasteries by Edgar, and monks devoted to celibacy introduced. The naturally irritated churchmen who were expelled could ill brook the loss of their lawfully acquired dignities, and only sought an opportunity to put forward claims for their restoration. This opportunity presented itself at the death of Edgar. The demise of the powerful king who had ousted them, gave an opportunity to clamour against the injustice of the past, and to seek for redress.<sup>3</sup> The Mercian duke sided with them,

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings, chap. ii.

<sup>2</sup> A. S. Chron., Wm. of Malm., Roger of Wen., Hoveden.

<sup>3</sup> Wm. of Malmesbury.



whilst the duke of East Anglia supported the new order of things, and consequently a most furious contest ensued.<sup>1</sup> The wily Dunstan was compelled to resort to his usual system of miracle-working, in order to prevent the general return of the secular priests to the monasteries. A council was called at Winchester, at which the *crucifix* is said to have sanctioned Dunstan's innovations by speaking to the following effect: "Far be it from you; you have done well; to change again would be wrong."<sup>2</sup> This imposture, however, did not quite settle the matter, and consequently another meeting was convened at Calne, when the floor of the upper chamber in which the "witan" was assembled gave way, and the whole of the members were killed or severely hurt, except Dunstan, whose chair most *miraculously* stood firm amidst the surrounding wreck.<sup>3</sup>

31. Edward's reign was short and his end tragical. William of Malmesbury asserts that his stepmother had the chief authority during his brief reign. This, however, seems improbable, since we learn from William himself, and other old chroniclers, that Dunstan was still in high favour at court, and it was he undoubtedly who had the principal management of affairs. Elfrida's ambition led her to desire supreme authority, and she was in no wise scrupulous as to the means of obtaining it. She who could desire to sacrifice a husband that she might become England's queen, we may readily believe was well fitted to take any step which might render the accession of her son to the throne secure. She consequently appears before us in the character of an accessory to a diabolical murder, and, secondly, a murderess herself. Edward had been hunting in Dorsetshire, and took advantage of the occasion to visit his stepmother, who was living at Corfe castle. She presented him with wine, but whilst drinking it he was stabbed by one of her attendants. He galloped off, but becoming faint from the loss of blood, fell from his horse, and was dragged for a considerable distance in the stirrup. His death was the immediate result, and he was privately interred at Wareham in the year 978.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Hoveden.

2 Wm. of Malmesbury, lib. ii, c. 9, note.

3 Ibid, A. S. Chron., Hoveden, Hy. of Huntingdon.

4 A. S. Chron., Wm. of Malmesbury.

## ETHELRED, (THE UNREADY.)

32. The vile deed of Elfrida, although it resulted in the elevation of her own son to the throne, by no means satisfied the full extent of her wishes. Rarely, indeed does crime produce the anticipated results of the perpetrator. Sometimes, indeed, the semblance of the desires is obtained, and often but the semblance. If expected pleasures, however, are not derived, certainly the sting of remorse, and frequently the stroke of chastisement are experienced. In this instance the beauty of Elfrida was lost in the execrable deed of which she had been guilty, and the country doomed to suffer bitterly through the imbecility of him whom she had raised to the throne. She afterwards performed acts of penitence, but they were only artifices to appease the conflicts of an accusing conscience.<sup>1</sup>

33. The angel's hand was already uplifted over a guilty nation—over a people that had permitted such crimes to pass by unpunished, and almost unheeded. In the year following the coronation of Ethelred there was a bloody cloud seen in the heavens in the likeness of fire.<sup>2</sup> Well might the superstitious Saxons be ready to tremble at the appearance of such an omen. Well might they be ready to expect the vengeance of an offended God. In the year 980 the Danes re-appeared—the instruments for the punishment of the guilty. Southampton, Thanet, and Chester were ravaged by them.<sup>3</sup> They came this time to leave no more until the whole of England had owned their sway.

34. It would be tedious and unprofitable to follow the history of the inroads of the Danes throughout this reign. I shall consequently rather seize upon the most important events which give it a peculiar character. I must first notice the weakness of Ethelred as displayed in the means adopted by him to ward off the attacks of his enemies. Edgar, as we have before seen, had bequeathed to his son a powerful fleet; other sovereigns had greatly strengthened the defences of the kingdom, so that powerful means were at Ethelred's disposal to repel the Danes. But then the mantle of Edgar had not fallen upon Ethelred. Edgar's bravery and Edgar's

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<sup>1</sup> Wm. of Malmesbury, Roger of Wendover.

<sup>2</sup> A. S. Chron.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

vigilance were alike wanting in his son. And so the resources of the country were not applied to their legitimate purposes. The fleet of Edgar was soon destroyed. Another and another were collected, but each was destined to attain the same inglorious end.<sup>1</sup>

35. Ethelred was surrounded with timid counsellors; the cowardly expedient of bribing the enemy to depart was adopted; and with the loss of a nation's independence departed a nation's hopes. In A.D. 991, £10,000 were given to the Danes to leave; in A.D. 994, £16,000; in A.D. 1002, £24,000; in A.D. 1007, £36,000; in A.D. 1012, £48,000. Thus were the inhabitants deprived of a large part of their incomes; the monasteries stripped of their valuables; the application of the tax of Danegelt (which had been established to provide a fund for the defence of the country) prevented,—in consequence of the weakness and impolicy of Ethelred.

36. Ethelred had recourse to a foreign alliance, perhaps hoping thereby to obtain assistance in repelling the enemy which his own resources, properly directed might have enabled himself to overcome. He married Emma, sister to the duke of Normandy. His hopes in that direction, however, if he entertained any, signally failed.<sup>2</sup> We read of no expedition from thence to assist the frail monarch. This may account for the harshness with which the despicable Ethelred treated his Norman wife.<sup>3</sup> The truth is the Norman duke had enough difficulties of his own without encumbering himself with the misfortunes of others. The piratical Danes too were his kinsmen; and those Normans who came over with Emma, and were placed in situations of trust, were the first to desert the offices with which they had been entrusted.<sup>4</sup>

37. Ethelred was unfortunate in the selection of his officers. Often would the tide of victory have rolled in favour of the Saxons, had not the treachery of their leaders delivered them into the hands of their enemies. Thus the names of Elfric and Eadric are branded with disgrace as

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1 A. S. Chron., sub. an. 1009.

2 Thierry.

3 Roger of Wendover, Wm. of Malmesbury.

4 Hoveden.



traitors to their country. Yet so infatuated was this weak monarch that these men received the false premium of their iniquity in being repeatedly replaced in the command of forces they had so shamefully deserted.<sup>1</sup> Thus in 992, Elfric, who was commander of the king's forces, warned the Danish army of their danger, and during the night previously to the battle deserted to them. Yet in 1003 we find him again in command of the army, and when in sight of his opponents feigning himself ill that he may avoid bringing the Danes to an engagement.<sup>2</sup> In 1002, when the English ships were ready to attack the Danes, the cowardice or treachery of Edric prevented them; whilst in 1015 he deserted to Canute with forty ships.<sup>3</sup> This second traitor was bound by the ties of kindred as well as patriotism to be faithful to his country, having married the king's daughter. It is satisfactory to learn that the hand of justice visited the criminal with condign punishment; for, pleading his deserts afterwards before Canute, as having been the betrayer of two sovereigns for the purpose of elevating him to the throne, he was by the king's orders hanged and his body thrown into the Thames.<sup>3</sup> Ethelred's conduct appears in striking contrast with that of Canute, he having ordered Elfgar, the son of Elfric, to be blinded as a punishment for his father's crimes. Yet he afterwards restored Elfric to his confidence.<sup>4</sup>

38. The climax of Ethelred's cruelty appears in his diabolical massacre of the Danes throughout England upon the festival of St. Brice.<sup>5</sup> This not unusual course of procedure, —the frequent resort of weak princes—produced its merited chastisement. I cannot pass over this event without taking exception to the words of Thierry in reference to this execrable expedient. He regards it as "one of those acts of national vengeance which it is equally difficult to condemn or to justify." For the treacherous massacre of thousands, irrespective of age or sex, most assuredly merits the fullest condemnation from a christian historian. The abhorred

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1 A. S. Chron.

2 Anglo-Saxon Chron., sub. an. 992 and 1003.

3 Ingulph.

4 Anglo-Saxon Chron.

5 Hy. of Huntingdon, Hoveden.

crime led to the dethronement of the Saxon monarch. Sweyn invaded the country. Ethelred, destitute of the means and courage for defence, fled to the Isle of Wight, and thence departed and sought refuge with his brother-in-law at Normandy.<sup>1</sup>

39. In the following year (1014) Sweyn died, and Ethelred was invited by the chief men of the kingdom to return, upon condition that he should rule them better than he had hitherto done.<sup>2</sup> Having promised what was required of him, and further that he would become a "loving lord" to them, he was permitted to return to experience the vengeance of the son of Sweyn. After a series of imbecile acts, unworthy of record, Ethelred expired in the year 1016,<sup>3</sup> unlamented by the people whom he had brought to the verge of ruin. His character is depicted to us as a compound of all those vices generally attendant upon weakness, without one redeeming quality.

#### EDMUND (IRONSIDE.)

40. Edmund undertook the reins of government at a most inauspicious moment. The country had been ravaged, houses destroyed, and the people plundered. No common bond of unity amongst the miserable remnants of inhabitants presaged a termination to their misfortunes. The increasing numbers of Danes daily arriving gave no hope that the day of their deliverance from barbarian tyranny was at hand. Had Edmund immediately succeeded to the throne of his grandfather Edgar, hopes might have been brighter and the degradation of England avoided. But now, alas! the day was gone by. The Danes had obtained a firm footing in the island, and most of the fortified places were in their hands. They had a large army at their command, supported by a powerful fleet. They were elated with success, and were led to entertain exaggerated notions of their invincibility; whilst the opposite of all these promising circumstances was the lot of the Saxons. Fearful prospect for such a people in such a case!

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1 A. S. Chron., Wm. of Malmesbury.

2 "This covenant between king and people is exceedingly interesting, as it is the first formal acknowledgment of the principle that a loyal people rightly demand justice from their king."

3 A. S. Chron., Wm. of Malmesbury.

41. Could the valour of an individual have averted the stroke of fate pronounced upon a devoted nation Edmund's would have been found sufficient. With an ill-disciplined and ill-appointed army Edmund nevertheless had seven engagements with the Danes during the year of his reign (1016), and was often victorious.<sup>1</sup> All the treachery of Edric, who had now joined Canute's army, was brought against him, but for a time in vain. Yet he could not improve the advantages he often gained over his enemy from the weakness and insufficiency of his forces. Had the people thronged around his standard as they should have done; had he ascended the throne a few years earlier; had he had a less powerful and politic enemy to deal with than Canute, he had assuredly rescued his country from foreign thralldom. As it was he gained the respect of his powerful rival, Canute, and after challenging, and as some say, engaging in single combat with him, these two great men agreed to divide the kingdom between them, Edmund receiving the country south of the Thames and Canute the territory to the north. Edmund did not long enjoy his honours, having been treacherously slain the same year at the instigation of Edric. Edric, happily, received the reward of his guilt by having his head placed upon a pole on the highest battlement of the tower of London.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henry of Huntingdon.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## LEARNING DURING THE FOREGOING PERIOD.

1. How chequered are the events of a nation's existence ! How similar to those of personal history. To infancy succeeds childhood ; then follows youth, which is chased off by old age ; whilst old age at length yields to death.<sup>1</sup> All is rise and progress until the zenith is attained, when decay follows and death supervenes. We are now engaged in considering the second period of our nation's history—the history of its childhood, infancy having faded away. Very little need be said of learning in England in the ninth century. The first seventy years, to the time of Alfred, were frittered away in contests with the Danes, and the latter portion has been almost exhausted in our study of the life of Alfred. The progress we might have expected to behold, after the stimulus given to education by Bede, Aldhelm, and Alcuin, was completely checked by the wild incursions of the Danes. The repose necessary for literary advancement was wanting in such a state of society. The peaceable scholar was compelled to give up his studious profession and join in the warrior throng, or depart to a foreign country where his labours would be appreciated. Thus was England robbed of its brightest ornaments. Without teachers there could be no pupils, and consequently no educational establishments ; so that when Alfred ascended the throne ignorance was triumphant. The efforts which he made to remedy the evils have already been recorded. At his death England could once more boast of her educational establishments. Once more flourished here scholars of no mean

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1 "Optima quæque dies miseris mortalibus ævi  
Prima fugit : subeunt morbi, tristisque senectus :  
Et labor, et duræ rapit inclementia mortis."

Virgilio Georgica. lib. iii, 66.

attainments, attracted by his liberality and patronage. How melancholy to reflect that the fruit of his labours should have been so soon lost to those who had such pressing need of it! Yet so it was. He shone like the noon day sun between passing April showers. Whilst he lived England's home was illuminated; when he disappeared the superincumbent clouds burst asunder, and ignorance deluged the land.

“Eripiunt subito nubes cœlumque diemque.”

The schools established by him were soon annihilated. The learned men invited here by him left no worthy successors. The kingly interest manifested by him for the welfare of his subjects was perpetuated by few of his successors; and fatal ignorance became again paramount.

2. If Edward established a school at Cambridge, we know nothing of its details. If Athelstan was friendly to learning, the limits of his patronage were narrow. If education was encouraged at the monasteries we are ignorant of its results. To speculate upon probabilities would be but mere trifling with the patience of my readers, and my remarks upon this head will consequently be but few. Edward was certainly anxious to promote the interests of his people intellectually. Athelstan was not unmindful of them. The remaining kings were either the subjects of the monks, or too much engrossed in military occupations to care anything about mental improvement. Of the churchmen in whose hands education was invested we know little. Dunstan is the most conspicuous. But even he could have cared but little about it, as we find him extolled for miraculous absurdities, for his zeal in promoting the interests of the church, and for his mechanical ingenuity and his political intrigue.<sup>1</sup>

3. Whilst learning was flourishing in England under the

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LORD'S PRAYER IN SAXON.

Uren fader, thic arth in heofnas :  
 Sic gehalgud thin noma :  
 So cymeth thin ryc :  
 Sic thin willa sue is in heofnas and in eortho :  
 Uren hlaf oferwistlic set us to doeg :  
 And forgefe us scylda urna sue we forgefian scyldgum urum :  
 And no inlead usic in custnung :  
 Ah gefrig usich from ifle.

Coote's Hist. England, vol. i, p. 488.

guardianship of Alfred, in the east a revolution in letters was in progress which was destined to effect not only immediate but successive generations. The Arabians began to study. They prosecuted their researches in earnest. They soon made manifest what persevering exertion could accomplish. They were not monkish drones, eking out their time in performing what they were *commanded* to accomplish; they studied because study was congenial to their tastes. Schools were soon established amongst them, as at Bagdad, Cusa, and Basora. Under the caliphates of Almanzor, Haroun al Rashid, and Mamun, learning flourished, and the most rapid advances were made in the sciences, particularly those of medicine, geometry, astronomy, algebra, and philosophy. Learned men found patrons in the courts of the Arabian princes. Libraries were formed, to furnish which Greek works were translated into the Arabian tongue. Wherever Arabians were found, there indeed was learning perceptible; whether it was in Syria, Africa, Spain, or Italy. Wherever they went they became the most famous teachers. They stimulated the Europeans to diligence, and whatever learning was found in Europe after the tenth century was embellished with Arabian scholarship.<sup>1</sup>

4. In the east of Europe learning again flourished in the ninth century—Constantinople being the theatre of learned men. In the west some progress also was made. Louis the Meek employed Benedict to reform the monasteries of France, and the rule of St. Benedict became universally acknowledged. Charles the Bald, too, encouraged learning. He multiplied schools, and extended his favour to the Anglic school. His brother and contemporary, Lothaire, ruler of Italy, erected schools in his dominions and encouraged learning there.<sup>2</sup>

5. During the tenth century learning still flourished among the Arabians. But although Leo the Philosopher, and the ninth Constantine, patronised and encouraged it, it nevertheless declined under the later emperors of the east during this century. In the west ignorance lamentably prevailed. This was, indeed the age of iron to the Latins;

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<sup>1</sup> Mosheim's Eccles. Hist., vol. ii, p. 287, et passim.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., vol. ii, p. 289, et passim.



yet in the eastern provinces schools were founded and a few learned men were found.<sup>1</sup> It was during this century that the Arabic numeral cyphers were introduced into Europe. Towards the close of this century the genius of pope Sylvester the Second brought about a restoration of learning. He was a mathematician, obtaining his knowledge of numbers from the Arabians. He himself wrote a book on geometry. Those who wished to acquire a learned education now travelled into Spain and Italy to obtain it from the Arabians.

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1 Mosheim's Eccles. Hist., vol. ii, p. 390, et passim.

## CHAPTER IX.

## MONASTERIES.

1. In studying the history of any art or science we are naturally inquisitive to know, not only its inventor and improvers, but also the circumstances with which the discoverers were surrounded whilst making their investigations. It is not enough for us to know the country in which they were born, the position they held in society, or even their private character, but every incident in connection with them becomes of absorbing interest. Their homes, their habits, their companions, the facilities at their command for advancing the particular objects in view, all claim their share of our attention. Thus it is with the subject before us. We hear Cædmon Aldhelm, Bede and Alcuin, spoken of as learned men; but this is not enough: we desire to know how and where they obtained the knowledge they possessed; where and upon what conditions learning generally was to be obtained. The subject is indeed involved in darkness. The writers of the day generally recorded those events which were then considered of primary interest. A battle, or a miracle, received due attention; whilst many of those matters which we now wish to enquire into, as for instance, the particulars of their manners and customs, are only mentioned incidentally. The great events of the times generally attract the attention of the historian, as well as of the contemporary people for whom he writes; whilst those minor matters which make up the real history of a nation, as of an individual, are left untouched, or receive only a passing notice. It is only when a people begin to think more rationally; when civilization is advanced, and newspapers and pamphlets appear; when nature in its more dignified phase begins to assert its proper sway, that men perceive the value of those institutions which their forefathers despised

or neglected, and thinking, employ their pens upon them. There were learned men amongst the Saxons. How and where was their learning obtained? From the scanty and scattered materials which remain to us I will by and bye endeavour to reply.

2. Amongst the ignorant, learning is generally valued at a low standard. Who has not, even in our own day, met the man who considered learning a fit application for school boys only? How much more prevalent must that idea have been when ignorance was so general! To write for the amusement or instruction of a people successfully is to study their tastes and pamper their appetites. To write a work in the early days of Saxon learning, when the universal standard of the reader's mind was so low, with the expectation of getting that work read, was to appeal to the passions in the fiery language of poetry; to interest the mind with narrations of military exploits; to affect the heart with details of monkish superstitions. Thus are the histories of the times teeming with fabulous narrations, or with the monotonous repetition of uninteresting military adventures. Thus the domination of an arbitrary churchman is minutely depicted, whilst the occupation of the "sons of toil" is left unnoticed. The sack of a monastery is circumstantially related, whilst the character of the inner life of one of its members is left for our shrewd guess. We know more of the beauties of the situation of a monastery; more of the privileges of its inmates, than of the inhabitants of a village, or of the situation and employment of the children of the masses. As monasteries were the seminaries of the times, let us briefly enquire into their history and character.

3. Under the persecution of the Roman emperor Decius, (A.D. 249—251) and his immediate successors, many persons who from a love of solitude, and a careful solicitude for their own lives, retired to deserts in such numbers that they "almost destroyed the solitude they sought." Believing that in solitary places they could more faithfully serve their Creator, and knowing that in such places personal safety was more secure, many forsook the world and secluded themselves from mankind. Amongst this number we may distinguish Ammon, who during the third century retired to



a mountain in Egypt; Antony,<sup>1</sup> who about the commencement of the fourth century secluded himself for twenty years, and then preached to the people, who flocked to hear him, on the advantages of domestic life; and St. Basil, who about the middle of the fourth century retired to Pontus, after travelling and visiting many foreign monasteries, and there caused many monasteries to be founded, and formed a set of rules for the guidance of the monks. These rules enforce the necessity of charity towards the poor, moderation in food and dress, obedience to superiors, confession to priests, and patient industry. They descend to great minuteness of detail with regard to admissions, and the daily behaviour of monks, especially towards their superiors.<sup>2</sup> The system of Basil was rigorous in the extreme, exalting good works and favouring the idea that the due performance of them would render the actors independent of a crucified Saviour for salvation. St. Basil died in the year A.D. 378. During this century monkery rose into great repute. The monks were of two classes, those who lived as hermits,<sup>3</sup> apart from communion with mankind, termed Anchorites and Eremites, and those who associated themselves in bodies, termed Cænobites.<sup>4</sup>

4. Monachism, originating in the east, passed silently into the west, and made its appearance in Italy, as some writers affirm, in the year A.D. 340. St. Martin erected the first monastery in Gaul soon after his election to the bishopric of Tours in the year A.D. 374,<sup>5</sup> by whose disciples the

1 St. Anthony was the first who formed the solitaires, or monks, into a regular body and framed rules for them. Although these were concocted in Egypt, they were introduced by his disciple Hilarion into Palestine and Syria, whilst Eugenius about the same time introduced the monastic order into Mesopotamia. "Their example was followed with such rapid success that in a short time the whole east was filled with a lazy set of mortals, who abandoning all human connections, advantages, pleasures, and concerns, wore out a languishing and miserable life amidst the hardships of want and various kinds of suffering, in order to arrive at a more close and rapturous communion with God and angels."—Mosheim's *Eccles. Hist.* vol. i, p. 378.

2 Fox's *History of English Monasteries*.

3 Hermits were not uncommon in Egypt, Syria, India, and Mesopotamia before our Saviour's coming.—Mosheim's *Eccles. Hist.*, vol. i, p. 275.

4 Wilkinson's *Catechism of Church History*.—The Anchorites practised the most excessive severity. They dwelt in the wildest places, had no houses, and lived on herbs and roots. Another class, the Sarabaites, were a set of impostors. They trafficked in relics. At first they were laymen, but were afterwards admitted amongst the number of the clergy.—Mosheim's *Eccles. Hist.*, vol. i, p. 381.

5 Monkery spread so rapidly that St. Martin's funeral was attended by 2000 monks. Mosheim's *Eccles. Hist.*, vol. i, p. 378.

monasteries in England are supposed to have been founded. These monasteries soon became "schools and seminaries of sound and useful learning." The monastery at Bangor (Iscoed, in Flintshire) early became celebrated, in which, Bede informs us, there was so great a number of monks that the monastery being divided into seven parts, with a ruler over each, none of those parts contained less than three hundred men who all lived by the labour of their hands.<sup>1</sup> As early as the second century there appears to have been a school established here, which soon acquired an important reputation. It has been asserted that in this school Pelagius was educated,<sup>2</sup> though this appears to be a mistake, as it was probably at Bangor, in Ireland, where he received his education.<sup>3</sup> This monastery was destroyed by the pagan king Ethelfrid.<sup>4</sup> In the fifth century St. David is said to have established twelve monasteries in Wales.<sup>5</sup> During the sixth century, Daniel, the last abbot of Bangor, in Flintshire, established a school in Cærnarvonshire, which he distinguished by the name of Bangor, and which was at length elevated to a bishopric.

5. Monkery was introduced into Ireland by St. Patrick, who landed there A.D. 432.<sup>6</sup> St. Brigid, Columba, and others, favoured their extension. The sixth and seventh centuries, indeed, were the periods of monastic increase and opulence in Ireland. In the seventh century we have a most favourable picture of the literary state of that island in comparison with that of England. Bede says that at this time many persons, both rich and poor, passed over to

1 "The early monasteries contained preachers, teachers, and artificers. This gave them an amazing power to evangelize. They formed an independent communion, and the heathen heard the gospel and saw its possessors far beyond them in civilization. Thus the monastery diffused both an acquaintance with useful arts and a knowledge of Christ."

2 Warrington, vol. ii, pp. 366-375, on the authority of Roland's *Mona*.

3 Moore's *History of Ireland*, vol. i, p. 206.

4 Bede, lib. ii, c. 2.

5 During the fifth century the monks of the east began to rise into importance, great privileges being now granted to them. But they had as yet no settled rule. Thus some followed the rule of Augustine, others that of Basil, Antony, Athanasius, or Pachomius. We are told that during the sixth century they so increased in numbers "that whole armies might have been raised out of the monastic order, without any sensible diminution of that enormous body." Congall, a British abbot, about this time persuaded the people to abandon all industrial employments, and to engage in religious acts in solitude. His disciples swarmed throughout Ireland, Gaul, Germany, and Switzerland, - Mosheim, vol. ii, p. 32, et passim.

6 Bede, p. 214.

Ireland to prosecute their studies, where they were supplied by the Scots (Irish) with books to read and teaching gratis.<sup>1</sup>

6. In the year 635, Aidan was invited by Oswald of Northumbria to England, and monasteries were forthwith founded here. St. Columba introduced the system into Scotland. The celebrated Theodore and Adrian greatly favoured the system of monachism. In the different monasteries, at home and abroad, the rules of government were most diverse; some adopting those of Basil, others following the rules laid down for their government by Fructuosus, Isidore, Johannes Gerundinensis, and Columba. The monasteries of Weremouth and Jarrow soon attained distinction. Founded by Benedict, Jarrow became the abode of the venerable Bede, who there provided for us that inestimable literary treasure, his Ecclesiastical History, the chief authority we possess of the affairs relating to the history of our country previously to his time. Asceticism received a great stimulus in the seventh century by the devotion of an increasing number of people to monastic life, and by the erection of many new monasteries, as well as by the repair of the old ones.

7. The barbarous invasions of the Danes were the greatest evils the monasteries had to bear at this early period. Liberally endowed, and thus enabled to possess the good things of this life in abundance, they offered tempting prizes to these cruel plunderers. Not content with robbing these hospitable mansions of their wealth, and murdering their inmates, the Danes completed their depredations by committing the buildings themselves to the flames. Yet they were speedily rebuilt in a more elegant style, through the liberality of some generous penitent.

8. We must now approach the period of the revival of monachism, and the new phase it took. Dunstan's history is the true history of monkery. His life was a great struggle for its re-organization and increase. Commanding the purses and wills of successive sovereigns, zealous for the church to which he belonged, and ardently attached to monkery, he was admirably adapted for the execution of his design. From the time when he was appointed abbot of

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1 Lib. iii, c. 27.



Glastonbury to his death he laboured incessantly in the cause. Numbers of monasteries were established and restored at his instigation, and munificently endowed. The first that may be mentioned was Glastonbury, which was in a most dilapidated condition during the reign of Edmund. By Dunstan's persuasion it was restored, and himself appointed abbot. During the reigns of Edred and Edgar the greatest efforts were made to erect and restore monasteries, and wealth was lavished upon them with princely liberality. Glastonbury, Croyland, Peterborough, Abingdon, Chester, and many other abbeys, shared largely in the favour of one or both of these princes. Forty monasteries are said to have been founded by Edgar himself. Thus were they multiplied in number, and increased in size, splendour, and wealth. The Benedictine rules, as modified by Dunstan, were introduced and strictly enforced, producing the most lamentable effects.

9. St. Benedict, who composed the "*Regula Monachorum*," was born in Italy, in the year A.D. 480. Educated at Rome, he afterwards retired to a desert, and was at length chosen abbot of a neighbouring monastery. Disliking the regulations, he returned to his solitude, where he was besieged with admirers, and at length established no less than twelve of those institutions. He retired to Monte Cassino in the year A.D. 528 or 530, and there founded another monastery, and composed the rules referred to above.<sup>1</sup> Dunstan, however, modified these rules ere he introduced them into England. Among other things, the Benedictine rules, as introduced into the English monasteries, enforced the strict obedience of the monks to their abbot. The juniors were to treat the seniors with every respect. The abbot was elected by the whole society, but appointed the prior himself. He was to seek the advice of the monks in times of difficulty. He was allowed to administer corporal punishment for faults, if other means of correction failed. Among the punishments awarded may be mentioned, separation from the brethren at table, prayer, &c. Silence was strictly enjoined, no one being allowed to speak unasked. "The head and the eyes to be inclined downwards." Midnight service

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1 English Cyclopædia, McIntosh's History of England, vol. i. p. 48.

was to be performed. The inmates were to sleep with their clothes on. No private property was allowed. On Saturdays those who had served for the week, and those who were newly appointed, were to clean all the plate, for which an extra allowance of victuals was given. One pound of bread and three quarters of a pint of wine were allowed to each daily. Their working hours were prescribed by rule. When on a journey they were to say the appointed services. Strangers were to be kindly received.<sup>1</sup>

9. Alfric, archbishop of Canterbury, and Edward the Confessor warmly supported monachism. During the reign of the Norman princes the system was exposed to frequent fluctuations—now flourishing, now depressed. Upon the death of an abbot the revenues of the abbacy were not unfrequently retained by the king during pleasure. The immense wealth here accumulated became the object of covetous desire to the powerful, till at length the unscrupulous rapacity of a licentious and profligate monarch accomplished their destruction.

10. When we reflect upon the munificent endowments of our ancestors, we are naturally tempted to enquire into the causes of that feeling which induced them so liberally to expend their temporal wealth upon religious institutions. Without attempting to enter into a lengthened disquisition upon this topic, it will be in accordance with my design to dismiss the subject with the following brief remarks. At the period we are referring to, the minds of men were tinctured with the belief, artfully inculcated by the priests, that man was capable of *meriting* God's favour by his own good works; that in proportion to his charitable endowments were his rewards, forgetting that the Bible declares that when we have done all we are but unprofitable servants. Man's naturally guilty conscience, stung by recent sin, would induce him gladly to compound for his offences by the sacrifice of a portion of his earthly riches. And at this time "bounty to the church atoned for every violence against society, and the remorse for cruelty, murder, treachery, assassination; and the more robust vices were appeased, not by amendment of life, but by penances, servility to the

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1 Fox's English Monasteries, p. 99.



monks, and an abject and illiberal devotion.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, for the quieting of his conscience, he would found and endow some monastic establishment. How often are we reminded of the liberality of some prince towards the church, who has committed some base crime. What was the life of Edgar but a compound with the monks, in the shape of gifts of land, for indulgence granted to him for his licentious habits? Yet again when the horrid doctrine of purgatory, and the necessity of prayers for the dead, were insisted upon, in direct violation of the scripture, the death-bed sinner would gladly dispose of that wealth which he could no longer enjoy to the priests, who would perform spiritual services for his departed soul. Whilst a few who had the welfare of their fellow creatures at heart would contribute towards the establishment of popular colleges, where teachers might be trained for the instruction of mankind. These were a few of the motives which urged men to a liberal distribution of their wealth. Having thus briefly related the history of the establishment of monasteries, I must now briefly allude to the occupation of the inmates of these religious houses. Who can calmly inspect the ruins of such venerable abbeys as remain among us? What emotions are they calculated to excite! Here in some sequestered nook, amidst the sylvan beauties of nature, did they once tower in majestic pride. There rolls some gentle rivulet, whose waters were decoyed to form some placid lake for the preservation of the finny tribe. Here trolled the inmates, as well for the supply of the table as for their own amusement. A dry ditch is perhaps alone left to mark a spot once an object of so much anxiety to its masters. There lie the ruined and perhaps beautifully carved fragments of the mouldering walls of the once noble structure. There some weather-beaten image reminds us of the tastes of its erectors. The decayed building still bears ample testimony to its former grandeur. In those green meadows once roamed men now amongst the pious dead. Those shady lanes were once trod by the destitute beggar, the persecuted unfortunate, and the benighted traveller. By those gateways were they all admitted, and by huge fireplaces were their hearts made glad with temporal

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<sup>1</sup> Hume, vol. i, p. 48.



comforts and spiritual advice. None were turned empty away. In this apartment were kings and nobles handsomely entertained, received such ghostly and sage advice, were so impressed by the apparent zeal of the humble self-denying monks, that extensive domains were profusely awarded to their already rich possessions. Whilst treading the dust of some once venerated image, our thoughts are involuntarily turned on ages past. The monotonous midnight chant, the choir of sacred music, are now almost reverberating in our ears. The uplifted rod is still inflicting penance upon some sorely lacerated frame. In that compartment perhaps once sat those *scriptores* to whom we are indebted for what knowledge we possess of the days of yore. The vellum roll is before them. How beautiful its transcriptions! How brilliant those ornamental paintings which adorn it! No rattling of printers' types, no steam printing press is there: all is done by the persevering efforts of a skilful hand. Here is their school for the instruction of youth. The rich and the noble are the pupils. No poor peasant boy was here to have his natural faculties developed; this is a boon reserved only for princes. Do we question our imagination as to their subjects of instruction? The reply is involved Latin sentences are being unravelled. We hear the tones of rhetoric enthusiastically resounding, or the sweet notes of music intoned. The scholastic drudgery of elementary reading and writing attempted. The modern curriculum of studies was unknown. There we may see some venerable monk poring over elaborate MMS. of classic lore or modern history, or recording annals for the instruction of future ages. But turn we to another part of the building, and we here may picture the kitchen, the refectory, or the banquetting hall. It cannot be the season of Lent, for we are tempted to believe that the feasting and rejoicings of the inmates are still heard and seen by us. The old abbot himself even indulges in the good cheer which abounds. Or turn we again to another part of the building and the blacksmith's hammer and the carpenter's saw are here fast plying.<sup>1</sup> In this garden were the culinary requirements of

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1 One of St. Basil's rules requires the monks to apply themselves to handicrafts that they may render themselves useful to others.

the kitchen reared by the industry of the inmates: here were those bright gems of nature, "nature's eyes," blooming in perfection, and tended by the careful hand of some monkish botanist.<sup>1</sup> Such is a faint picture of a monastery in those early times.

11. Had not monasteries existed in those days, no history of the events then enacted could have reached us. No tittle of learning could have been perpetuated, when private homes were insecure, and public seminaries unknown. Personal exertion could not have supplied the desideratum, when books, the basis of instruction, could only be obtained by a rich and powerful community. In monasteries were the schools; in monasteries the instructors; in monasteries the authors and printers of the times.<sup>2</sup> The great and the noble were the patrons of these venerable institutions, to which, notwithstanding their abuses in after times, we cannot help glancing without a lingering attachment. For these were the only sure places of refuge to the persecuted, the only safe asylum for virtue, the only homes of relief for the destitute, the only hospitals for the afflicted, the only repositories of learning. The monks were the lawyers, offering counsel to the would-be litigants. They were the only physicians, for they only had time and the necessary qualifications for the study of the properties of herbs. They were the artists, the painters, architects, and sculptors, and their attainments in these respects were often of no mean order. They, as I before said, were the chroniclers of the times, and the schoolmasters of such as desired education, and women were often amongst the number of such.<sup>3</sup> Monasteries were the most noble institutions of the day—their inmates the most respected of mankind.

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1 Bede's Eccles. Hist., lib. ii, c. 2.

2 See Osborne's *Anglia Sacra*.

3 Kemble's *Saxons in England*, vol. ii, p. 432, et seq.—Bede, H. E.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE DANES IN ENGLAND

1. Although England was at the early period of which we write a nominally christian land, yet pagan manners were still retained, and national vices still cherished. The Saxons were a drunken people.<sup>1</sup> Deeply did they imbibe the poisonous draught which has hurled more victims to an untimely grave than the ambition of the conqueror, or the scourging pestilence. The rude blast may shake and uproot the towering though feeble-rooted tree—the overwhelming torrent may sweep the house built upon sand from its insecure resting place; but it is the incessant roll of the ocean wave that dissolves the rocky barrier and permanently submerges the continental home. Thousands of soldiers may perish in a single campaign, yet their loss may be estimated and their fatal end suitably lamented; but the millions who yearly perish through the fatal seductions of drink, waste away unheeded. The Saxons were a drunken people. What of their descendants, the English of the present day? Is not an Englishman's name, associated as it is with all that is brave, enlightened, and free, connected with the nation's curse—drunkenness? Alas! too true. The Saxon character in this respect, as in many others, is too truly maintained. But cold-blooded national murder had yet to be added to

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1 In a fragment of Anglo-Saxon poetry, quoted by Turner, we have a description of a Saxon feast. Holofernes, the principal character, is thus represented:

“So was the wicked one all day,  
The lord and his men,  
Drunk with wine,  
The stern dispenser of wealth,  
Till that they swimming lay  
Over drunk,  
All his nobility,  
As they were death slain.”

“They were accustomed to eat till they became surfeited, and to drink till they were sick.”—Wm. of Malmesbury.



the previous crimes of the Saxons, ere the thunderbolt of vengeance with overwhelming fury was to be hurled upon them.

2. The Danes, or Northmen, belonged to the great Teutonic wave of migration, and were consequently closely allied to the Saxons of England and the victors of Normandy. The conquerors of the ancient Britons now jealously guarded their acquired territory from further depredations of their countrymen. The Saxons upon their arrival in England were, as has before been related, pagans, gradually embracing christianity through the efforts of the Roman missionaries. The Danish tribes inhabited the more northern portion of the western side of Europe, their most southern territory being the present duchy of Sleswick.<sup>1</sup> A sufficient cause of enmity to their kinsmen, the Saxons, is found in the fact of the latter people having embraced christianity.<sup>2</sup> The motive which induced them to invade the territories of the Franks and Saxons was undoubtedly a desire for plunder, which gradually increased into a wish to obtain a settled home. Driven from their own habitations by their parents in search of fortune, they mercilessly plundered any unwary or unprotected people. Success attending their efforts, they at length acquired possessions in the countries they had devastated. In a future chapter of this work we propose briefly to narrate the conquests of the Norman Rollo, and the history of his successors. For the present we are concerned with the Danes who finally obtained possession of our island home.

3. The history of the Saxon kings, from the time of the politic Egbert to the reign of the Ironside Edmund, is but a recapitulation of bloody battles with the Danes, educing Saxon bravery or exposing Saxon weakness. The bravery and prudence of Alfred; the caution and skill of Ethelfleda; the power of Athelstan, could but afford a temporary respite to the incessant attacks of the Danish pirates; and had not Rollo directed the attention of his countrymen to the Frankish territory, England would in all probability have much earlier succumbed to these northern barbarians. To

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<sup>1</sup> Latbam.

<sup>2</sup> Thierry's Norman Conquest, lib. ii.

give a detailed narration of the different invasions of the Danes would be but a tedious repetition of much that has already been said, I shall therefore content myself with taking up our national history at the death of Edmund Ironside and the accession of Canute, premising a few remarks upon the motives which rendered the Danish conquest so comparatively easy.

4. The Danes had left their continental home because their increasing populations could not be sustained in a comparatively barren country by their imperfect system of agriculture.<sup>1</sup> Dwelling where the waves of the Atlantic rushed wildly upon a rocky shore, they early became inured to danger and acquired a taste for a seafaring life. In the words of Sharon Turner, "The whole nation abhorred tears and wailing, and never wept for a dying friend."<sup>2</sup> Possessing great physical strength, invincible courage, and indomitable perseverance, they at length subdued the Anglo-Saxon people and obtained the reins of power when the valour of Athelstan had decayed, the unity of Horsa and his followers had been destroyed, and to the piety and prudence of Alfred had succeeded the brutal treachery of Ethelred. They imported among the worn out and disorganized Saxons vigour, strength, and order.<sup>3</sup> The murder of Edward, the mutilation of Elfrida, the massacre of the Danes, and the licentiousness of the people, were visited with immediate and signal retribution, unmistakeably exemplifying the truth of the proverb "Though hand join in hand the wicked shall not go unpunished."

5. Many concurrent circumstances favoured the invasions of the Danes. Making their first appearance in England in the reign of Egbert, ere the establishment of a monarchy had consolidated the resources of the people, or enabled the generals to concentrate the whole forces at their disposal and act with common energy, they acquired advantages which they might not otherwise have obtained. When the country was distracted by party intrigue and internal dissensions—when the ancient Britons, although driven into the mountains of Wales, the forests of Cornwall, or the

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1 Worsaae's *Danes and Northmen*, p. 16.

2 *History of Middle Ages*, vol. i, p. 29.

3 *Introduction to Rollo and his race*, p. *xxi*.

heights of Cumberland, yet still unsubdued, were continually harassing them,<sup>1</sup>—the Danish raven could often appear conspicuously victorious. The Welsh, the Cornish, and the Cumbrians, the refugees from eastern and southern Britain, were the natural enemies of the Saxons, and often were they found, if not actually arrayed under the banners of the Danes, yet rendering them all the assistance of interested allies.<sup>2</sup> Now furnishing the Danish rovers with food and shelter,—now descending with their native forces upon the cultivated Saxon lands, and escaping with plunder, they distracted the attention of the Saxon rulers, and rendered a division of their not too powerful forces necessary. In later times, when by their own powerful influence, and the weakness or ill-judged prudence of Saxon monarchs, the Danes were admitted to a share of the Saxons' acquired territory, a basis for future successful expeditions of the Danes was formed. And though instances are not wanting when a Danish Brithnoth fought for the maintenance of the people's independence against new hordes of adventurers, yet more frequently are the Danish settlers found following the fortunes of some kinsman adventurer. Disagreement amongst themselves, and the enmity existing against the Danish settlers, were favourable circumstances for the pirates of the north.

6. The massacre of the Danes by the weak and misguided Ethelred induced the powerful Sweyn to undertake to avenge his injured countrymen. His premature death was no great loss to the Danish cause, leaving, as he did, so able a successor in the person of his son Canute. Edmund Ironside being cut off by the treachery of his countrymen, the undisputed sovereignty of England was left to the powerful Canute.

7. Few conquerors have left behind them a character so well deserving of the title of "great" as Canute. To rule a people so heterogeneous in character as the inhabitants of England were at this period required no small amount of prudence and decision; and the difficulty of accomplishing this object was of course greater to a usurper than to a

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<sup>1</sup> Worsaae, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Worsaae, p. 8.



hereditary sovereign. But Canute seemed born to command. He had the requisite persuasive eloquence to attach a subject to a monarch, and the power to enforce the suggestions of his will; and although he at first appears before us as a barbarian, he afterwards evinces the character of an enlightened sovereign. He thus furnishes a singular example of a king rapidly passing from barbarism to civilization and christianity. Though not without failings sufficient to demonstrate his alliance with the sons of earth, yet the general tenor of his character was even and exemplary, and may consequently be studied with profit by all who are anxious to tread the path of rectitude. In pursuing his history we must bear in mind that it has been handed down to us by Saxon writers, who were the inveterate enemies of the Danes, and we must consequently make great allowances for many of their descriptions.

8. Upon the death of Edmund, the Saxon Wittenagemot was assembled, and, overawed by the power of the new monarch, feebly upheld the rights of the Saxon princes, the sons of Edmund. To obtain better treatment for them than they had reason to expect, the Saxon nobles are represented to have interpreted the will of Edmund in favour of Canute's acting as regent for them until they should obtain their majority.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this conduct saved the young princes from a premature grave. Canute doubtless desired their death. But how was this to be accomplished? If the young princes died in England, their death would be ascribed to the king, and he must expect nothing but irreconcilable enmity from his Saxon subjects, and eternal obloquy from mankind. He consequently entrusted them to the care of a petty Scandinavian prince, intimating, it is said, his will with regard to their ultimate end. If he expected that the Swedish king would put them to death, he was mistaken, for that prince entrusted them to the care of Solomon, king of Hungary, where they were treated with honourable distinction. Edwin (or Edmund, as he is called in Hoveden) soon died, whilst the younger, Edward, obtained the hand of Agatha, sister of the queen, and daughter of Henry, second emperor of Germany, the issue of which

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1 Hoveden.

marriage was Edgar Atheling, Margaret, who afterwards married the king of Scotland, and Christiana.

9. One of Canute's first actions displays the sagacity of his mind and his abhorrence of the criminal actions of an intriguer. Thus the traitor Edric was not long in receiving the reward to which his treacherous service entitled him. Some say that having compassed the death of Edmund, he hastened to Canute to obtain the reward he considered himself to have merited, by securing to Canute the undivided sovereignty of England, but that Canute justly deeming such a traitor too dangerous a friend, had him instantly put to death. Others state that having been deprived of Mercia, he appeared before Canute, insolently demanding reparation, upon which he was despatched. In either case, punishment at length overtook him. Several other traitors experienced a similar fate, Norman, Ethelwold, and a certain Edwy, being amongst the number.<sup>1</sup> The policy of Canute in thus punishing these cowardly traitors is parallel with that of David as recorded in sacred writ, and with that of Richard I. hereafter to be noticed.

10. Upon his accession to the throne, Canute divided England into four parts,<sup>2</sup> Edric obtaining Mercia, Thurkill, East Anglia, and Eric, Northumbria; reserving to himself the kingdom of the West Saxons. This was evidently a politic act, though intended but as a temporary arrangement; for the authority of these men was but a shadow, and of brief duration,—Edric being soon slain, and Thurkill and Eric banished the kingdom. Thus did Canute rid himself of men whose birth, power, or previous conduct, rendered them objects of jealousy or fear.

11. Canute's next step was as wisely conceived as it was successfully executed. Alfred and Edward, the two sons of Ethelred, had taken refuge with their uncle, Richard of Normandy. Richard had declared that he would replace them in their lawful inheritance, and actually fitted out a fleet for that purpose. But a storm shattered the vessels, which was regarded as a significant omen that such an expedition should not have been undertaken, and rendered

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<sup>1</sup> Henry of Huntingdon.

<sup>2</sup> Anglo-Saxon Chron.

Richard disposed to listen with a favourable ear to the advances which Canute made for the hand of Emma, the widow of Ethelred. The alliance of such a sovereign as Canute was not to be despised by Richard; the offer of the hand of such a warrior was not to be rejected with disdain by the forlorn Emma, even though he had been the chief cause of the evils of her husband's family. He proposed and was accepted, and the marriage was celebrated to the great inward joy of the Saxon people, who expected naturally expect an alleviation of their sufferings from such an auspicious event. They were not disappointed. Though apparently indifferent to the future fortunes of her family, she appears to have exercised her influence in behalf of the suffering Saxons.<sup>1</sup>

12. Upon his accession to the throne, Canute had a large Danish army in England, and was compelled to collect immense sums of money from the distressed and dispirited Saxons for its maintenance. It is probable that he did this by no means unwillingly. London had long remained faithful to the declining fortunes of Ethelred. London had long held the Danish forces in check, and it could not be but gratifying to semi-barbarous pride to impose upon Londoners a heavy penalty for their faithfulness. Canute, moreover, had not yet adopted those measures of prudent conciliation and praiseworthy impartiality which won for him the good opinion of the conquered, and affixed to his memory the surname of "great." But he was, as has been before remarked, a politic ruler, open to argument and conviction, and thus the gentle influence of his Norman wife was at length instrumental (according to the ancient chroniclers) in procuring the dismissal of his Danish mercenaries.<sup>2</sup>

13. The Angles and Danes were now placed on the same footing, and both compelled to submit to the previously established Saxon laws.<sup>3</sup> Canute had sound reasons for this lenient course of procedure, independently of his home policy. He meditated an attack upon the Scandinavian territory, but he could not undertake to accomplish it if the

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1 Roger of Wendover.

2 A. S. Chron., Hy. of Hun., Roger of Wen.

3 A. S. Chron.



seeds of rebellion and discontent were manifest in his newly acquired kingdom. All grounds of fear, on this head, having been at length removed, however, he was at liberty to direct his attention to those foreign affairs which had doubtless long engrossed his attention and excited his ambition. Accordingly, in the year 1019, he left England for Denmark with forty vessels.<sup>1</sup> He took with him the flower of the Saxon nobility, that no powerful leader may excite rebellion, and direct the attention and resources of his once mortal enemies against the Danish government during his absence. And thus the singular fact becomes prominent, that notwithstanding the large proportion of his time which he spent away from England, no serious conspiracy threatened to subvert the authority so recently acquired.

14. In the year 1024 Canute directed his forces against the Swedes, but was defeated by them in a great battle.<sup>2</sup> He did not, however, despair of finally triumphing over them, and accordingly resolved to give them battle again on the morrow. He was anticipated, however, by the English general, Godwin, who accompanied him, and who, leading his English forces against the enemy during the night, surprised and routed them.<sup>3</sup> This, we are told, procured for him an earldom, and laid the foundation of his future greatness.<sup>4</sup> In the year 1028, Canute went with fifty ships to Norway, driving its king (Olave) out, and subjugating the country.<sup>5</sup>

15. Canute's was a life of ceaseless incident. His was a mind whose qualities could not remain dormant. No sooner had he subjugated the Scandinavian people than he determined to present himself in person before the sovereign pontiff at Rome, and thither in 1031 he accordingly proceeded.<sup>6</sup> This was perhaps the most happy undertaking of his reign for the Saxon people. There was frequent communication between the English and Roman churches in those early days. At Rome there was an English school. In the eternal city there yet remained many monuments of its ancient grandeur to attract the curious and studious.

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1 A. S. Chron. Hy. of Huntingdon says he went there to fight with the Vandals.

2 A. S. Chron.

3 Roger of Wendover.

4 Wm. of Malmesbury.

5 A. S. Chron.

6 A. S. Chron.

Imperishable works of art still beautified it, and many of the sages of the age were still concentrated there. But many were the impediments to be overcome ere the capital of the world could be reached. Independently of the physical difficulties of the journey, when no Napoleon had arisen to make a highway across the snowy summits and rugged defiles of the Alps, there was the plunder of native princes, through whose territories the traveller must needs pass to be anticipated. Canute's representations whilst at Rome to the emperor Rodolph, and certain other petty princes whom he happened to meet there, were effectual in procuring the removal of these exactions. Upon the appointment of an English archbishop he was compelled to go to Rome to receive the pall, which entailed upon him a very heavy expense. Canute indignantly complained of this exaction to the pope, and procured future exemption from the grievance.<sup>1</sup> He also obtained the pope's promise that the tribute heretofore paid by the English school at Rome should be abolished.<sup>2</sup>

16. His visit to Rome appears to have had a very great influence upon his mind, as his epistle (transcribed by William of Malmesbury, from which I have drawn the information in the last paragraph, and which was transmitted by the hand of Living to the English people before his own return to England) abundantly proves. I cannot, therefore, resist the desire to extract the following portion of it for the benefit of my readers. "Be it known then, that since I (Canute) have vowed to God himself to reform my life in all things, and justly and piously to govern the kingdoms and the people subject to me, and to maintain equal justice in all things; and have determined, through God's assistance, to rectify anything hitherto unjustly done, either through the intemperance of my youth, or through negligence; therefore I call to witness, and command my counsellors to whom I have entrusted the counsels of my kingdom, that they by no means, either through fear of myself or favour to any powerful person, suffer, henceforth, any injustice, or cause such to be done in all my kingdom. Moreover, I command all sheriffs, or governors, throughout my whole

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<sup>1</sup> William of Malmesbury.

<sup>2</sup> Roger of Wendover.

kingdom, as they tender my affection or their own safety, not to commit injustice towards any man, rich or poor; but to allow all, noble and ignorant, alike to enjoy impartial law, from which they are never to deviate, either on account of royal favour, the person of any powerful man, or for the sake of amassing money for myself: for I have no need to accumulate money by unjust exaction.<sup>1</sup>

17. Upon the return of Canute to England he led a hostile expedition against Malcolm, king of Scotland, and reduced him to a state of allegiance, thus nominally, at least, becoming king of England, Scotland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

18. The character of Canute appears in a variety of phases, according to the different periods of his life at which we view it. At first we observe a prudent and determined general, then a calculating prince. Now wielding the sword of justice and holding the balance of impartiality. Now the ambitious sovereign, and now the repentant son of the church. Of his literary character we unfortunately know little, yet that little is by no means unfavourable to him. We cannot expect to see a barbarian prince, springing from the bed of northern ignorance, imbued with zeal for the promotion of literature. We do not expect to see literary institutions flourishing under a king habituated to fighting, and whose latter days were spent in exposing himself and people to the battle-axe of northern barbarians. Yet we are told that he was a patron of literature.<sup>2</sup> Even a stanza of his own composition is still preserved.

“Merrily sang the monks within Ely,  
When that Canute, king, rowed thereby;  
Row, my knights, row near the land,  
And hear we these monks sing.”<sup>3</sup>

19. Two anecdotes, illustrating the character of Canute, remain to be noticed ere we close the narrative of his history. To rebuke the flattery of his courtiers, we are told that upon

<sup>1</sup> Wm. of Malmesbury.

<sup>2</sup> Though his administration was harsh, he neglected no means of giving it a native colour. He even composed songs, which were sung alike by Saxons and Danes. He patronized both the Latin literature of the monks and the native poetry of the Scalds. Mackintosh's *Hist. England*, vol. i, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Knight's *Popular Hist. Eng.*, vol. i, p. 157.



one occasion he ordered a seat to be placed for him by the seashore as the tide was rolling in, and commanded the sea not to roll over his land, or presume to wet its sovereign's feet. The waters, however, neglected his command, and the king was compelled to flee from its fury, upon which he took occasion to rebuke his courtiers for their flattery, exclaiming, "Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings; for there is none worthy of the name but He whom heaven and earth and sea obey by eternal laws." From that time the king is said to have worn his crown no more.<sup>1</sup> Upon another occasion we are told that he killed an innocent man, and accordingly he ordered his judges to award him the punishment due to his crime, which at that time consisted of a fine of forty talents of silver for murder. This the king not only agreed to pay, but increased the sum to three hundred and sixty talents, adding, moreover, nine talents of gold which were handed over to the surviving friends of the deceased.<sup>2</sup> Canute died in the year 1035.<sup>3</sup>

#### HAROLD.

20. If the name of Canute did honour to the Danish invaders, the names of his sons as much disgraced it. With the name of the first Harold is associated all that is low and vile in human nature, without one redeeming quality. There is but one consideration which enables us to think indulgently of this Danish-Saxon prince, viz., the notices of him were all written by his enemies. These accounts may have been, and probably were, exaggerated: we may hope that they were. It is our province, however, to relate what the chroniclers say of him, and leave our readers to form an opinion upon the truth of their statements.

21. Canute had three sons, Sweyn, Harold, and Hardicanute. Sweyn obtained the Norwegian kingdom, and Harold the kingdom of England. At the time of Canute's death party feeling ran high. The Danes in England were numerous, and, having been lately the dominant power, had acquired an extensive influence, especially in London and

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1 Hy. of Huntingdon, Roger of Wendover.

2 Gleig.

3 Anglo-Saxon Chron.

northern districts. They naturally desired a Danish sovereign. Such an one was Harold, the son of Canute, by his first and probably Norwegian wife.<sup>1</sup> The Saxons were still, however, an important people, especially in the southern districts. They would have preferred a Saxon ruler, but Alfred and Edward, the sons of Ethelred, were in Normandy.<sup>2</sup> Hardicanute, the son of Canute by Emma of Normandy, was in Denmark. Yet his claim was supported by Godwin and other Saxon nobles, whilst the claim of Harold was enforced by the Danish lords. Harold's party was victorious, and in a council held at Oxford he was elected king<sup>3</sup> of the northern part of the island; whilst to Hardicanute was assigned the southern district, his mother, Emma, taking up her abode at Winchester and there upholding his interests. Thus was a civil war avoided,—the probability of which at one time appeared so strong indeed that numbers of the people took refuge at Croyland, and there produced the greatest disturbance.<sup>4</sup>

22. Emma appears to have invited her sons Alfred and Edmund to Winchester, when a disturbance took place. Harold probably fancied that his crown was in jeopardy whilst the rightful Saxon heir to the throne was on English ground. Godwin appears to have been won over to Harold's interest.<sup>5</sup> He, after having hurried on Alfred towards London for the avowed purpose of obtaining an interview with king Harold, detained him and placed him in close custody. Hoveden thus speaks of this event: "Some of his attendants he dispersed, some he placed in chains and afterwards put out their eyes; some he scalped and tortured, and deprived of their hands and feet by cutting them off. Many, also, he caused to be sold, and in various and shocking ways he put to death six hundred men at Guildford. On hearing this, queen Emma, in great haste, sent back her son Edmund, who had remained with her, into Normandy; whereupon, by the command of Godwin and certain others,

1 It has been asserted that he was a shoemaker's son, and palmed upon Canute as his son. This, however, is improbable.

2 Roger of Wendover.

3 Hy. of Huntingdon.

4 Ingulph.

5 Malmesbury says that Godwin for some time restrained his opponents by the power of his name; but at last overcome by numbers and violence he was obliged to give way.—Lib. ii, c. 12.

the Clito Alfred was led in the most strict bonds to the Isle of Ely; but as soon as the ship came to shore, on board of it, they instantly in the most cruel manner put out his eyes, and then, being led to the monastery by the monks, he was delivered into their charge. Here, shortly afterwards, he departed this life, and his body was buried with due honour in the south porch on the western side of the church.”<sup>1</sup>

23. These terrible tidings brought to Emma induced her to leave England. She accordingly proceeded to Flanders, where she was hospitably entertained by Earl Baldwin. Whilst here she was visited by her son Hardicanute.<sup>2</sup> Harold was crowned king of the northern part of the island in the year A.D. 1035, and, in consequence of Hardicanute's absence, king of all England in the year A.D. 1037. He died in the year A.D. 1040.<sup>3</sup>

#### HARDICANUTE.

24. The death of Harold paved the way for the elevation of his half-brother, Hardicanute, to the throne. A sovereignty founded by Sweyn and consolidated by Canute, attained the climax of its greatness under him. Its glory waned under Harold, and finally departed under Hardicanute. The Danes, to whom the Saxons had become more reconciled through the munificence and impartiality of Canute, were again held in abhorrence, and the Saxons sighed for the return of their native rulers, anticipating thereby an improvement in their condition. The change of dynasty, however, was neither instantaneous nor abrupt: Hardicanute's reign was the transition period.

25. Hardicanute was the son of Emma of Normandy by Canute. Upon the death of his father, the southern part of the kingdom was allotted to him, as has before been related. The known character of Harold doubtless prevented him from assuming that portion of the divided sovereignty which had been awarded to him. There was much sagacity displayed in this resolution of his. Had he attempted to exercise a monarch's authority during his brother's lifetime,

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1 Hoveden. See also Roger of Wen. and A. S. Chron.

2 Roger of Wendover, Hoveden, Hy. of Huntingdon.

3 A. S. Chron.



we should doubtless have had to record a second Alfredic tragedy. For the unscrupulous mind of Harold would probably have suggested some means for ridding himself of so obnoxious a rival. As it was, he remained abroad until Harold's death, and then being invited to return by both Danes and Saxons, he complied with their request and became monarch of England.<sup>1</sup> If it be asked why Edward, the son of Ethelred and Emma, was not elected, I reply in the words of Malmesbury, "Ethelred's sons were held in contempt nearly by all, more from the recollection of their father's indolence than the power of the Danes."

26. The first act of Hardicanute upon his return to England was one of retributive justice, yet mixed with singular vacillation, cupidity, or fear. Godwin, and his accomplices in the cruel treatment of Alfred, were called to account. Godwin averred that he only did what he was compelled to do by the commands of Harold. To ingratiate himself in Hardicanute's favour, he presented him with a "galley, or ship, of exquisite workmanship, having a gilded beak, provided with the choicest equipments and fitted out with splendid arms, and eight hundred picked soldiers. Each one of these had on his arms bracelets of gold, weighing sixteen ounces, a triple coat of mail, a helmet on his head, partly gilded, a sword girt to his loins, with a gilded hilt, a Danish battle axe ornamented with gold hanging from the left shoulder, in his left hand a shield, the boss and studs of which were gilded, and in his right hand a lance, which in English language is called 'ategar.'"<sup>2</sup>

27. His next act was one of barbarous and senseless ferocity. By his orders Harold's body was exhumed and thrown into the Thames. It was afterwards recovered, however, by the Danes, and buried at London.<sup>3</sup>

28. In his second year he imposed an enormous tax upon the people, amounting to £21,089, for the army; and after that there was paid for thirty-two ships £11,048.<sup>4</sup> This heavy tax brought about a general murmuring. The nobles now regretted that they had invited him back, as we learn

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<sup>1</sup> A. S. Chron., Hoveden.

<sup>2</sup> Hoveden, p. 110.

<sup>3</sup> Hoveden, Wm. of Malmesbury.

<sup>4</sup> Hy. of Huntingdon.

from most of the old chroniclers. Two of the collectors of the tax were put to death at Worcester, which so incensed the monarch that he sent thither a large army, "with orders to slay all they could, and, after plundering the city, to set it on fire, and lay waste the whole province."<sup>1</sup> This inhuman order was too faithfully executed. Hardicanute did not long survive this atrocious act,—dying whilst carousing at a feast of one of his nobles at Lambeth, after an inglorious reign of two years.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hoveden.

<sup>2</sup> A. S. Chron.

## CHAPTER XI.

## LANGUAGE AND LEARNING DURING THE DANISH PERIOD

1. A very few words will suffice to describe the character of learning in England during the Danish period. The Danes were a barbarous people. Such events as were committed to writing by them in their northern homes were inscribed in Runic letters upon more durable material than paper or parchment. Their genealogical histories were registered upon rocks, and affairs of less importance to them were inscribed upon beechwood. Some of them used bark, and polished horns of the reindeer and elk, and these were made into books of several leaves. Inscriptions on tapestry, bells, parchment, and paper, were of later date.<sup>1</sup> It has been customary to regard the Danish influence upon the manners and customs and language of the Saxons as slight. The reverse of this, however, is true. The language of England at the present day must necessarily bear a Danish stamp, for we cannot suppose that settlers in a most important part of a country for one hundred and fifty years should have failed to influence the language of an infant state; that a mixed race of Saxons and Danes should have exclusively cultivated the language of the one to the total neglect of the other. More reasonable is it to assume that the Danish language had an important influence upon the Saxon. In consequence, however, of the two tribes originally speaking dialects of the same language, it is impossible now to determine the precise amount. Yet we are not altogether ignorant of the impression which the Danes made upon our literature. Local names still testify what written accounts have failed to do. The late researches of Mr. Worsaae have brought many hidden things to light.

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholson's Historical Library, p. 23. See also Sharon Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons, vol. i, p. 206.



2. The eastern counties of England bear the most unmistakeable evidence of the Danish sway. Here the termination "by" (of Danish origin) is the most frequent, which a cursory glance at the names of places in Lincolnshire will testify. Nor is this surprising, for the eastern part of England was the Danes' peculiar place of settlement. The Wash was a favourite landing place, Lincolnshire a favourite home. Situated nearer to the Danish territory than the other parts of England, the Danes could the more readily obtain succour, or, in case of misfortune, more easily retreat. Moreover, here was the most fertile part of the island. Destitute of such mountains as are found in the north and west, and the immense woods and marshes of the centre, it the more readily yielded the fruits of the earth. The northern portions of England were early peopled by the followers of Guthrum; the southern part contained inhabitants of Saxon blood; whilst the western district was still retained by the Britons. Lincolnshire and Yorkshire were the two Danish counties, and here we find the most numerous traces of a Danish occupation.

3. We often perceive traces of a people in the geographical nomenclature of a country, even when history is silent upon the point. Titles are given either to physical features, or to newly-built towns, whilst articles of common utility or handicraft employments receive special names, indicating the people who must have designated them. In order to furnish some idea of the extent of Danish influence, I will briefly allude to a few names of Danish derivation. First, with regard to the physical features. We have Wintertonness, Lowestoftness, Foulness, Shoeburyness, Sheerness, Dungeness, on the eastern coast, evident derivations from the Danish "naes," a promontory or headland. Now we search in vain for such names on the western coast of England; for in that portion of the island the Danish influence was never permanently established. Of towns we have Whitby, Wragby, from the Danish termination *by* or *bi*: Frusthorpe, Northorpe, from the Danish *thorpe*. Mr. Worsaae has, indeed, indicated as many as one thousand three hundred and seventy-three Danish-Norwegian names from the Danish terminations, *by*, *thorpe*, *thwaite*, *with*, *toft*, *beck*, *næs*, *ey*, *dale*, *force*, *fell*, *tarn*, and *haugh*. Then again of the names

of persons, we have Jackson, Johnson, Nelson, from the Scandinavian "son." Of popular names we have kirk, folk, kinsfolk, clapboard, lofts, crib, yule, cake, hustings, flit. Of titles, earl (northern jarl). The list might, indeed, be swelled indefinitely; but I trust enough has been said to show that the popular notion of the limited character of the Danish influence is a fallacy.<sup>1</sup>

4. The inhabitants of the north were always inferior, in a literary point of view, to the nations they invaded. This was the case with the barbarous invaders of Rome. The Saxon invaders were more uncivilized than the Britons, and the Danish pirates than the Saxon settlers. Thus was the progress of civilization in each case retarded by barbarous irruptions. Yet these invasions were not unmixed evils. The Britons had grown effeminate upon the visit of the Saxons, and Saxon energy had lost a portion of its pristine vigour upon the invasion of the Danes. A new stimulus was consequently infused into these decaying tribes by their successive conquerors. The Danes particularly assisted in the formation of the British seaman.<sup>2</sup> The same contempt of danger, and the same delight in his natural element, are still manifested by the English sailor. A few words will describe the state of learning in England during this period. The impetus given to it by king Alfred, and encouraged by his immediate successors, decayed in the time of the later kings, and became almost extinct through the atrocities of Sweyn. The monasteries founded in Dunstan's time, and encouraged by Edgar and his successor, were destroyed by ruthless Danes. The destruction of such seats of learning as may have been established by the early Saxon kings left no home for students, and no encouragement for the learned to remain

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1 Worsaae's Danes in England. Latham on the English Language.

2 "He (the Dane) could govern a vessel as the good horseman manages his horse; while on a voyage he could run across the oars while they were in motion; he could throw three javelins to the masthead, and catch them alternately in his hand, and would repeat this trial of skill without once missing."—Thierry, p. 21, c. ii. "Sometimes they (the Danes) cruised near the coast, watching for their enemy in the straits, the bays, and roadsteads; from which custom they were called Vikings, or children of the creeks; and at other times they would give chase and steer across the ocean. Often were the fragile barks wrecked and dispersed by the violent storms of the northern seas, often did the rallying sign remain unanswered: but this neither increased the cares nor diminished the confidence of the survivors, who laughed at the winds and waves from which they had escaped unhurt. 'The force of the storm,' they would sing, 'is a help to the arm of our rowers; the hurricano is in our service, it carries us the way we would go.'"—Thierry, p. 21, c. ii.

here. All was consequently dark and desolate at the accession of Canute. He is reported to have encouraged the foundation of monasteries, and to have paid some attention to the literary improvement of his subjects in England. Whether Oxford and Cambridge were seats of learning previously, and to what extent schools were founded in England, are matters of the utmost uncertainty. Something might have been done by Canute, perhaps much; but all is a matter of conjecture. The miseries of this period are fearfully depicted in the Anglo-Saxon chronicles, and Wulfstan has given us a horrifying picture of the state of the land at that period. "There was now no good, neither within nor without; but there was invasion and hunger, burning and bloodshed on every side, often and continually; and ravage and slaughter, plague and pestilence, murrain of cattle and sicknesses, slander and hatred, and plundering of thieves, injured us very severely, and unjust contributions oppressed us exceedingly. Therefore in this land were, as it may appear, now many years, many wrongs, and fidelity wavered everywhere with men."<sup>1</sup> The state of England at the period of Canute's accession appears to have been parallel to its condition before the times of Alfred. Then learning was depressed, for the learned had fled to obtain that countenance on a foreign shore which their own fatherland denied them. Alfred invited the learned to return—Canute appears to have done the same. Alfred invited hither foreigners—Canute did likewise.<sup>2</sup> The little, however, that could have been accomplished during the short reign of Canute leaves us no room to doubt of the generally ignorant state of the kingdom under the rule of his successors. During the short reigns of Harold and Hardicanute retrogression is all we are at liberty to mark.

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<sup>1</sup> *Biographia Britannica Literaria*, Anglo-Saxon period, p. 507.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *Lives of Haymo and Withman*.



## CHAPTER XII.

## THE RETURN OF THE SAXON LINE OF SOVEREIGNS.

1. The period of the Danish sway in England was very brief, barely comprising a quarter of a century. During that period three Danish kings reigned in England,—Canute, Harold, and Hardicanute.<sup>1</sup> The vices of the two latter had rendered the Danish rule obnoxious, and the ambition of Godwin, England's most powerful nobleman at that time, paved the way for the re-establishment of the Saxon race. Upon the death of Hardicanute Godwin's counsel was sought by Edward, who, having been invited to England by his half-brother Hardicanute, was still in the island. This wily baron advised Edward to seize the crown, and promised his assistance upon certain conditions most favourable to his own interests. Edward was to extend his friendship to Godwin personally, to marry his daughter Egitha, to sustain the powerful influence of his sons, and Godwin would secure the crown for him.<sup>2</sup> These propositions were agreed to, and Edward was proclaimed king A.D. 1042.<sup>3</sup>

2. Edward was the son of Ethelred (the Unready) and Emma. We hear very little of him previously to his ascending the throne, except his embassy to the English people at the command of his father upon the death of Sweyn, and his invitation to England by his mother Emma, in the reign of Harold, and subsequently by Hardicanute. Of an amiable

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1 Sweyn died in the year A.D. 1014. In 1016 A.D. Ethelred died, soon after which Edmund Ironside and Canute came to an agreement, by which "Edmund obtained Wessex, and Canute Mercia and the northern districts." The early death of Edmund, however, put Canute in possession of undivided sovereignty either in the year A.D. 1016, or 1017. Canute died A.D. 1035, and was succeeded by his son Harold; who, in the year A.D. 1040, was succeeded by Hardicanute. Hardicanute, the last of the Danish sovereigns, died in the year A.D. 1042. A. S. Chron.

2 It must be borne in mind that Edward, a son of Edmund Ironside, was still living with the king of Hungary, and was consequently the true heir to the throne.

3 Wm. of Malm., lib. ii, c. 13. — A. S. Chron., sub. an. 1042.

disposition, he was well adapted to grace a position in private life, but ill suited to sustain the dignity of a sovereign, especially in those troublous times. As was the father, so was the son—both imbecile. Godwin and his sons were indeed the real rulers of England during the greater part of his weak reign. But Edward was a religious man. His piety secured for him the title of "Confessor." He was moreover in heart a foreigner: continental principles displayed themselves in his actions. His abode in Normandy induced him to manifest a slavish adherence to Norman manners and customs, and this partiality led him to advance Normans to important posts of honour. Thus the Norman Ulf was created bishop of Dorchester, William, the king's chaplain, was appointed to the see of London, and Robert, also a Norman, advanced to the see of Canterbury.<sup>1</sup> His Norman training led him to despise Saxon customs, and injudiciously to introduce Norman usages. In addition to the cross,—the established Saxon mode of signifying the king's assent to official documents,—Edward added the impression of the great seal, according to the Frankish custom.<sup>2</sup> The Norman handwriting was preferred to the Saxon. Norman clerks were about his person, and business was conducted in the Norman style. "The consequence was, that under the governance of the king, and of the other Normans who had been introduced, the whole land began to forsake the English customs, and to imitate the manners of the Franks in many respects; all the nobles in their respective courts began to speak the Gallic tongue as though their great national language; executed their charters and deeds after the manner of the Franks, and in these and many other ways showed themselves ashamed of their own customs."<sup>3</sup> By such unwise and unpatriotic actions as these did Edward pave the way for the usurpation of the Conqueror.

3. Although he fulfilled his pledge to Godwin by marrying his daughter, yet in many respects did he testify his

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1 A. S. Chronicle.

2 "At first, many estates were even transferred simply by word of mouth, without writing or charter, and only with the sword, helmet, horn, or cup of the owner; while many tenements were conveyed with a spur, a body scraper, a bow, and some with an arrow."—Ingulph, p. 142.

3 Ingulph, p. 126.

disapproval of the alliance, and in some instances behaved with cruelty towards the amiable Egitha. Thus upon the banishment of her father she was confined to the monastery at Wherwell, of which the king's sister was abbess.<sup>1</sup> Yet according to William of Malmesbury she was a divine creature. He characterizes her as "a woman whose bosom was the school of every liberal art, though little skilled in earthly matters; on seeing her, if you were amazed at her erudition, you must absolutely languish for the purity of her mind and the beauty of her person." "Frequently have I seen her," writes Ingulph, "when in my boyhood I used to go to visit my father who was employed about the court; and often, when I met her, as I was coming from school, did she question me about my studies and my verses; and most readily passing from the solidity of grammar to the brighter studies of logic, in which she was particularly skilful, she would catch me with the subtle threads of her arguments."<sup>2</sup>

4. It may at first appear to us not a little strange that Edward should have been permitted to retain his throne without a struggle, immediately after three Danish kings had successively swayed the sceptre of England, and at a time too when so many powerful Danes resided in the kingdom. Many circumstances, however, contributed to render his accession comparatively easy, and his sway generally acquiesced in. In the list of circumstances which produced these events the influence of Godwin was of primary importance.<sup>3</sup> This nobleman, enriched by Danish patronage,

1 Wm. of Malmesbury.

2 Ingulph, p. 125.

3 Godwin was the son of Wulnoth, or Wulfnoth, a South Saxon nobleman. The vile Edric Streone appears to have falsely accused Wulfnoth to king Ethelred, who either banished him from the kingdom, or rather Wulfnoth thinking he was about to be seized fled of his own accord. He took with him a number of ships, and ravaged the southern coast, and appears afterwards to have joined the Danes. We hear no more of Wulfnoth, but Godwin his son soon rose into importance. He took an important part in the succeeding struggles; assisted Canute in his distant wars, and was by him endowed with the richest gifts. During the three succeeding reigns Godwin and his family were the most important personages of the kingdom. It has been asserted that he was the instigator of the cruelty perpetrated upon Alfred and his followers, in the reign of Harold, already recorded, with a view to his own aggrandisement. That he was most ambitious, and perfectly unscrupulous in the means he adopted for obtaining power, is unquestionable. He died suddenly at a feast at Winchester. Henry of Huntingdon, and other chroniclers, imply that this was a judgment upon him for just swearing that he had had no part in the murder of the brother of the king. An old northern saga asserts that Wulfnoth was origin-



long familiar with Danish customs, possessed of extensive wealth,<sup>1</sup> of commanding eloquence, of lofty ambition, impenetrable cunning, brave, generous, and apparently patriotic, was well calculated to win the populace over to that party whose views he embraced. Added to which he had sons as brave and skilful as himself, and ready to second his designs.

5. Then again, the amalgamation of the Danes with the Saxons during successive reigns, and especially under the impartial rule of Canute, had contributed in no small degree to allay ancient animosities, and rendered each party more ready to accept a prince of the other line. It might fairly be doubted, however, whether Edward's accession would have been obtained had there been a Danish Canute to claim the crown. No direct successor to Canute, however, appearing, the Danes passively submitted to Edward's authority.

6. Supported by the powerful influence of the family of Godwin, and further by the influence of the great nobles Siward and Leofric; and threatened moreover with invasion by the Normans should they refuse to acknowledge Edward's authority, he easily maintained his position. Being of an amiable disposition, no great apprehension was felt that by his elevation to the sovereignty he would infringe upon the privileges of the people, and he was thus the less likely to be disturbed by the Danes in England. Whilst the knowledge of the authority vested in the Saxon Godwin, the remission of the tax of Danegelt—established by Ethelred, the Unready—and other imprudent impositions, would be acceptable to the Saxons. Godwin would be disposed to use his utmost efforts to render the government popular, from a consideration of his recent royal alliance, and by the secret desire perhaps of ultimately claiming the crown for himself. The Normans too about his court would be no less assiduous in obtaining the good will of the Saxons, in

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ally a herdsman; that in consequence of Godwin's directing to his camp a Danish nobleman who had lost his way in an English wood, after a great battle between the Danes and Saxons, he became admitted into the Danish service, and rapidly rose therein; finally becoming the most powerful noble in the kingdom. As this tale, however, is entirely overlooked by the old English chroniclers, I am inclined to doubt its authenticity, especially as the records of himself and family, as found in the English chronicles, are entirely irreconcilable with such an assertion.

<sup>1</sup> His own earldom is related by Hoveden to have consisted of Kent, Sussex, and Wessex; his eldest son Sweyn's of Oxford, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Somersetshire, and Berkshire; and his son Harold's of Essex, East Anglia, Huntingdon, and Cambridge.

the hope, perhaps, that some day a Norman prince might sway the English sceptre.

7. Edward's first act was one of revengeful cruelty, whatever palliations of it may have been attempted by the old historians. Upon the pretence that his mother had not previously treated him properly, he seized her lands, and took away from her what riches she possessed, "consisting of gold, silver, jewels, precious stones, and other things,"<sup>1</sup> and banished her from the kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

8. Edward's partiality to foreigners was most impolitic. Normans were encouraged, and endowed with valuable preferments, both in church and state. The patronage of the king led them to cherish their natural hatred of the Saxons. Upon one occasion, a Norman baron, named Eustace, landed at Dover, and upon his finding a difficulty in procuring quarters for his followers a quarrel ensued. "The earl and his men being greatly enraged, slaughtered a great number of men and women with their arms, and trod down children and infants under their horses' hoofs."<sup>3</sup> Godwin espoused the cause of the injured Saxons, and was in consequence stripped of his honours, together with his sons, and banished the kingdom. His power and popularity, however, very soon secured his return, when he was re-instated in his former position, and the Normans in their turn exiled. It was during the interval of Godwin's banishment and his return that William the Norman came over, ostensibly to congratulate his cousin, really to improve his own prospects for obtaining the kingdom.

9. Soon after the return of Godwin and his sons an incident happened which strengthened William's hopes of the crown. Harold is in Normandy. How he came there is not easily explained, as the old chroniclers differ in their narration of the event. The most plausible account appears to be that of Henry of Huntingdon, whose narrative I

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<sup>1</sup> Hoveden.

<sup>2</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *sub. an.* 1051. William of Malmesbury (*lib. ii, c. 13*) says that "his mother had for a long time mocked at the needy state of her son, nor ever assisted him; transferring her hereditary hatred of the father to the child, for she had both loved Canute more when living and more commended him when dead. Besides accumulating money by every method, she had hoarded it, regardless of the poor, to whom she would give nothing, for fear of diminishing her heap."

<sup>3</sup> Hoveden.

transcribe: "Harold, crossing the sea to Flanders, was driven by a storm on the coast of Ponthieu. The earl of that province arrested him, and brought him to William, duke of Normandy. Whereupon Harold took a solemn oath to William, upon the most holy relics of saints, that he would marry his daughter, and on the death of king Edward would aid his designs upon England. Harold was entertained with great honour, and received many magnificent gifts.<sup>1</sup>

10. I shall not give a minute history of Harold's struggles with the Welsh during the reign of Edward; suffice it to say that his skill and bravery in contending with them were eminently successful. His military character rendered him an object of admiration to the Saxons; his generosity secured their affection, and his power rendered him a necessary instrument to the king. His ambition directed him to the prospect of the crown, and his prudence in turning his influence to the best account secured him the object of his wishes. Although Edward, the exile, had been recalled by the king from Hungary, doubtless with the intention of nominating him as his successor, yet the sagacity of Harold plainly saw in this imbecile prince an object only of pity or contempt, and he was permitted to end his days in England without molestation. This event, however, took place soon after his arrival. The recall of this prince seems to indicate that Edward never seriously named the Norman as his successor. Edward died in the year A.D. 1066, and Harold quietly succeeded him.<sup>2</sup>

#### HAROLD.

11. The period of Saxon domination was now drawing rapidly to a close. Edward died in the year A.D. 1066, and Harold, the son of Godwin, became king.<sup>3</sup> Not that he was the hereditary successor of Edward; but he founded his authority upon the professed *will* of Edward, and the suffrages of the people. His power was immense, his

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<sup>1</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, lib. vi, sub. an. 1063.

<sup>2</sup> It was in Edward's reign that a powerful force was sent to restore the heir of Scotland to his inheritance, by the dethronement of the regicide, Macbeth, of Shakesperian celebrity.

<sup>3</sup> A. S. Chron.



abilities of a high order, and he possessed those personal qualifications so frequently the harbingers of success. Ingratiating himself into the favour of the people during the reign of Edward, with an eye to the seizure of the crown upon that prince's demise,—cunningly averting the attention of the people from his most secret designs by his dazzling military exploits, he checked any disposition which might have arisen to suspect his aspiration to the throne. Sovereign power once obtained, by ascribing his position to the free choice of the people, he strengthened that innate love of freedom so deeply cherished by the Anglo-Saxon race.

12. Harold, however, was not the rightful king. Edgar, the grandson of Edmund Ironside,<sup>1</sup> was still alive, though ill fitted by his imbecile disposition for the sovereignty of England at this dangerous period,—when rival barons, of scarcely inferior power to the king, were scattered through the kingdom, and often engaged in dangerous quarrels with each other, or in bidding defiance to their sovereign. Edgar's claim was therefore passed over unnoticed, and Harold's sovereignty universally accepted. Only a few months, however, was he permitted to enjoy it. In the following year England submitted to another conqueror.

13. An untoward circumstance occurred towards the close of the late king's reign, which in its consequences decided the fate of the kingdom. Tostig, the brother of Harold, who had obtained the earldom of Northumberland upon the death of Siward, treated the people there so roughly that after a period of ten years' authority the Northumbrians rebelled, and demanded Morcar, the son of Elgar, as a substitute. The king granted the petition of the people. Morcar received the earldom, and Tostig fled to Flanders. Harold,

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<sup>1</sup> As has been previously remarked, Edmund Ironside left two sons, Edwy and Edward, who were sent by Canute (upon their father's death) to Olave, king of Sweden, by whom they were afterwards sent to Hungary. Edwy soon died there; but Edward married the sister of the queen of Hungary, and had issue, Edgar the Atheling, and two daughters—Christina, who became a nun at Romsey, and Margaret, who afterwards became married to Malcolm, king of Scotland, and whose daughter Matilda became the queen of Henry I. Edward was recalled to England by Edward the Confessor, but soon afterwards died. Edgar, his son, was proclaimed king upon the death of Harold; but was one of the first who submitted to William the Conqueror. He was some time afterwards engaged in a rebellion against William, but was subsequently reconciled to him. We afterwards find him a partizan of duke Robert; but fortunately for himself escaped the heavy penalty inflicted upon that prince and his followers. We have no particulars relating to the close of his life.—*Win. of Malmesbury*, lib. ii, c. 13; *Roger of Wendover*,

unfortunately for himself, does not appear to have taken such an interest in Tostig's affairs as his own schemes seemed to demand. The expelled brother only fled to obtain extraneous aid for the recovery of his earldom. Upon the accession of Harold he accordingly returned, visited the Isle of Wight, and then sailed to the Humber. Driven from thence by the earls Edwin and Morcar, he sailed for Scotland. He there received the countenance of the Scottish king, was supplied by him with provisions, and remained there through the summer. Leaving Scotland, he was joined by Harold, the Norwegian king; and shortly after, at the battle of Stanford-bridge, was slain by Harold, and his forces dispersed.<sup>1</sup>

14. This invasion was peculiarly unfortunate for Harold, for William the Norman was at the time only awaiting a favourable wind and sea to transport his forces for the conquest of England. Whilst Harold was in the north William set sail, and landed at Pevensey without opposition. His march to Hastings, and the fatal battle there, brought England once more prostrate at the feet of a foreign invader. Harold and his brother were slain in the battle; the weak Edgar was unfit for the command of an army; no other Saxon baron remained with sufficient influence to collect the scattered troops and ensure their unity in action, and William the Conqueror was proclaimed king.<sup>2</sup>

15. "It is strange though nearly 800 years have elapsed, and we are all descended as much from one people as the other, that party feeling has not died out when we contemplate these transactions. A patriotic glow enters our hearts when we hear of the noble resistance of the Saxons, and I believe few people in England now read the account of the battle of Hastings without an involuntary feeling of regret that the result was not different. The cause of this is, in the first place, the sympathy that naturally arises in all generous minds with a nation that is attacked, and defends its independence with courage; and secondly, in this particular instance, because, of the two contending nations here, one had like ourselves been born and bred within the

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1 A. S. Chronicle.

2 A. S. Chronicle.

four seas, and the other were foreigners—one spoke English, and the other French.”<sup>1</sup> But another cause might be added. We are still Saxons. The small number of Norman emigrants did not destroy the Saxon nationality, as our manners and customs, our language, our laws, still testify. The inhuman cruelty of William and his successor still excites our aversion of the Norman line of kings. Yet Providence so ordered it. Another race was to inspire new vigour into a decaying people. A sovereignty was to be established in unity with itself, whose extent and power should eclipse that of the most celebrated ancient empires. A people whose wealth should find no parallel in history; whose institutions should form the model of various future kingdoms; whose energy should be directed to promote the fulfilment of prophecy; whose name should never be forgotten whilst the present condition of human affairs should subsist,—was to arise upon the broken fragments of a diverse people.

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1 Landmarks of the History of England, p 24



## CHAPTER XIII.

REVIEW OF THE STATE OF LEARNING IN ENGLAND TO THE TIME  
OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR.

1. The state of learning in England at the close of the tenth century was at a miserably low ebb, as we have before seen. The eleventh century opened most gloomily. At its commencement the Danish massacres called forth increasing Danish forces to revenge the murder of their countrymen. England now became a scene of horror. Monasteries stripped, villages sacked, many of the people slain, the remainder heavily oppressed. Then succeeded foreign rulers, under whom civilization became to a certain extent reanimated. Saxon princes followed, during whose reigns—although great darkness prevailed—yet progression became again visible. Notwithstanding, the actual state of learning was, as was before remarked, in a wretched condition. “The clergy,” we are told,<sup>1</sup> “could scarcely stammer out the words of the sacraments; and a person who understood grammar was an object of wonder and astonishment.” Yielding to the influence of drink<sup>2</sup> the Saxons had become enervated and their minds rendered destitute of mental energy. Thus enfeebled they became an easy prey to their victors. Instead of dwelling minutely upon the literary character of the first half of the eleventh century, when, with regard to England, there is in fact nothing to say, I shall proceed to make a few remarks in connection with the literature and learning of the whole of the Saxon period. If in England there was darkness at this time, abroad there was increasing light. Although the eastern empire presents a no very flattering view upon the whole, yet even there learning was not entirely neglected. The short reigns of the emperors, and the internal discord

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<sup>1</sup> Wm. of Malmesbury, lib. iii.

<sup>2</sup> Wm. of Malmesbury.

which prevailed in consequence of the instability of government, checked its progress; yet a few emperors, as Alexius Comnenus, favoured it with royal patronage.<sup>1</sup> In the west, although despised by the nobles, there was a revival amongst the clergy, and the schools in Italy flourished. In France, learning revived under the comical Robert. The schools founded there flourished under his protection. At the commencement of this century independent seminaries were established there, where more was taught, and in a superior manner, than was the custom in the monkish habitations. Arabian learning now flourished. French teachers travelled to Spain to study, or gathered their learning from Arabian books. Physic and astrology also took their rise from this quarter.<sup>2</sup>

2. The reign of Edward has been aptly termed "a state of transition from the Danish to the Norman dominion."<sup>3</sup> The Danish language had blended with the Saxon. The Saxon had been enriched by the Latin words of Roman missionaries. Celtic remains were still manifest in the names of many of the physical features of the country; Celtic was still the language of the northern and western parts of the island, and traces of the military language of the Roman armies were still evident. It was now destined to receive another addition of "half-Scandinavian" character from Norman invaders.

3. Notwithstanding the different elements which have entered into the composition of the English language; notwithstanding the efforts of the Normans to abolish its use, the partiality of the conquerors to their native languages, and the fondness of Saxon historians and poets for Latin composition,—the basis of our language is still Saxon. Though by no means so euphonious as the Greek, it nevertheless supersedes the classical languages in expressiveness, and conveys a meaning to the illiterate effectually concealed in corresponding classical terms. The Bible, and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, contain but comparatively few words which have not a Saxon origin. It is so copious that it is capable of expressing any subject of human thought, as

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1 Mosheim's *Eccles. Hist.*, vol. ii, p. 457.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 462.

3 Worsaae.

Turner justly remarks;<sup>1</sup> and it is capable of embracing every variety of metaphor and simile. I subjoin two extracts that an idea may be formed of the large proportion of Saxon words contained in our language. The Saxon words are printed in italics, and are taken from Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons.

## SHAKESPEARE.

*"To be, or not to be, that is the question;  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The stings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them. To die! to sleep  
No more! and by a sleep to say we end  
This heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks  
The flesh is heir to: 'twere a consummation  
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep;  
To sleep! perchance to dream."*

## TRANSLATORS OF THE BIBLE.

*"Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord if thou hadst been here my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, Behold how he loved him."—John xi. 32-36.*

"The language of familiar intercourse, the terms of jest and pleasantry, and those of necessary business, the idioms or peculiar phrases into which words naturally run, the proverbs, which are the condensed and pointed sense of the people, the particles on which our syntax depends, and which are of perpetual occurrence," are in the main Saxon.

4. The subjects of instruction at this early period, and for many years afterwards, indeed, were arranged in two courses; the junior course consisting of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, and the senior comprising astronomy, geometry, music and arithmetic. The former was termed the Trivium, and the latter the Quadrivium.

5. We must not suppose, however, from the enumeration of the above subjects that a thorough scientific education was given. Most of them were touched upon in the slightest

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<sup>1</sup> Hist. of the Anglo-Saxons, lib. viii, c. 3



manner possible. Before the introduction of the Arabic system of notation, we can readily imagine how difficult must have been the work of calculation. Well might Aldhelm regard the science as too difficult for the powers of the human mind. With the Roman letters M, D, C, L, X, V, I, what could be done? The instruction in arithmetic consisted in committing to memory a few definitions, with which were mingled the most superstitious absurdities about the virtue of certain numbers and figures. A few definitions and axioms sufficed for geometry; the mere rudiments of Latin grammar, from a small treatise by Donatus, were all that was taught in Latin; and most of the other subjects were treated similarly. The logic appears to have been a little in advance; but even in the twelfth century, as we learn from John of Salisbury, the talents of the learned were employed in the solution of such questions as this, "Whether, when a hog was carried to market with a rope tied about its neck, and held at the other end by a man, the hog was really carried by the man or by the rope?"<sup>1</sup> Their geographical knowledge differed widely at different times. The great principles of physical geography were unknown; the knowledge of the simple nomenclature of a few portions of foreign land and water belonged to a few only, and that few chiefly the vendors of relics, or the pilgrims to the Roman city. Written laws were at first unknown, and subsequently they were few in number and simple in kind. The science of medicine was at first the study of old women, whose superstitious practices were as successful in the treatment of patients as we might have expected. Subsequently the monks became rivals to these old women; but amongst them holy water was esteemed as of more virtue in the cure of diseases than scientific prescriptions. Music was one of those branches of study which received the utmost attention, nine or ten years being spent by youths in its acquisition. The invention of the musical scale by a monk<sup>2</sup> of St. Croix, in Italy, in the eleventh century, facilitated the acquisition of this branch of study.

6. The difficulty of obtaining materials for composition was a great impediment to book learning. There were no

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1 Hallam's Literary Hist. of Europe, vol. i, p. 3. — Craik, vol. i, p. 6.

2 Musical characters were invented by Guido Aretino in the year 1025.

steam presses to multiply copies of any work which might be written, but all were MS. productions. There was no paper to be obtained at a merely nominal price. The old letters upon skins of parchment had to be erased perhaps before the work of writing could be commenced. Then again, the necessity of providing for the defence of the country was a duty imposed upon every male inhabitant capable of bearing arms. And we know that such an occupation unfits the mind for serious intellectual study.

7. The Anglo-Saxon writers in England, from the first invasion to the conquest in 1066, were not few in number, nor their works unimportant. Mr. Wright in his *Biographia Britannica Literaria* gives a biographical account of no less a number than eighty. Although it must be admitted that the *name* of many of these is almost all that is recorded of them; yet it must also be acknowledged that such names as Aldhelm, Alcuin, Alfred, and Asser would not have disgraced the golden era of English literature. True most of them preferred the Latin medium of communication to the Saxon.<sup>1</sup> But it must be borne in mind that Latin was the language of the learned, and for the learned alone were books written. Some few indeed, like Alfred and Aelfric, devoted their time to the translation of Latin works into the Saxon tongue; but the majority were content to write in the foreign language they had taken so much pains to master.

8. Public schools, corresponding to our notions of such institutions, were rare. The palace of a prince or bishop, or the schoolroom of a monastery, were almost the only seats of learning. In the former, the sons of the noble in birth and princely in fortune might acquire such knowledge as was then communicated. In the latter the future ecclesiastics received their education. Public institutions for learning were founded on the continent, and such undertakings were probably attempted in England. Oxford must indeed at this early period have acquired celebrity, for the historian Ingulphus there received the greater part of his education during the reign of Edward the Confessor. He himself says: "Now I, Ingulph, the humble servant of St. Guthlac and of

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<sup>1</sup> "It is the most striking circumstance in the literary annals of the dark ages, that they seem to us still more deficient in native than in acquired ability."—Hallam *Lit. His. Europe*, p. 8.

his monastery of Croyland, a native of England, and the son of parents who were [citizens] of the most beauteous city of London, being in my tender years destined for the pursuits of literature, was sent to study, first at Westminster, and afterwards at Oxford. After I had made progress beyond most of my fellows in mastering Aristotle, I also clothed myself down to the heels with the first and second rhetoric of Tully." From this reference of Ingulph to his early education at Westminster, we may infer that a school existed there at this early period, though the silence of the ancient chroniclers regarding such institutions proves how low schools must generally have been held in public estimation.

9. The chief compositions of the Anglo-Saxons were of a religious character. The lives of saints, sermons, sacred poetry, and ecclesiastical history, being the almost exclusive productions of the age. A prejudice against secular learning had been imbued by those ecclesiastics who gave a tone to the rest. It was inculcated in the most extravagant degree by Gregory I, the founder, in a great measure, of the papal supremacy, and the chief authority in the dark ages; it is even found in Alcuin, to whom so much is due, and it gave way but gradually in the revival of literature.<sup>1</sup>

10. Our chief authorities for the events of this period are Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The former in his Ecclesiastical History has given us an account of Britain down to the year 731. If diffuse and disconnected; if frequently disfigured by the marvellous and superstitious; if demonstrating too slavish an adherence to papal error, or too eulogistic of terrestrial saints, its historical value is nevertheless very great. But for it a large portion of the early history of our country might have been totally unknown to us.

11. The early part of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is chiefly a compilation from Bede: the remaining portion of it is the work of several hands. The events enumerated appear to have been taken from registers kept in different monasteries. To Alcuin we are chiefly indebted for what knowledge we possess of the kind of instruction given in his time. From Cædmon, and Aldhelm, and Bede, and Alcuin, and

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<sup>1</sup> Hallam's Literary Hist. of Europe, p. 4.



Asser, we may judge of the poetry and prose compositions of the times. Add to their writings the compositions of a few ecclesiastics of mediocre capacity, and the translations of Alfred, Aelfric, and a few other industrious churchmen, and the Anglo-Saxon authorities are before us.

15. We must bear in mind that the reflection of the ancient historical writings have alone reached us, most of the original MSS. having perished. Those MSS. which we possess were written since the time of Alfred, and the transcribers have no doubt in many instances given us their own opinions in preference to their author's. This fact also prevents our judging correctly of the real character of the Anglo-Saxon language, and the difficulty is increased from the consideration that there is no living language very closely resembling the original Anglo-Saxon, as far as we have means of judging. Although the English language is based upon the Anglo-Saxon, they are really two different tongues. An Englishman, not specially instructed, can no more decipher the language of his early ancestors than a stranger, so complete has been the change. The nearest dialect to it is perhaps the old Frisic, though here a sufficient diversity exists.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Spalding.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## BRITISH LITERARY CHARACTERS.

## ST. PATRICK.

1. Having given a general view of the character of England and its people to the time of William the Conqueror, I propose now to give a succinct account of the chief of those personages who influenced our literature during this period or subsequently. Of such men no one was perhaps more distinguished than Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. Though not born in Ireland, he spent the greater part of his time there. There he eked out the early part of his life in slavery, there he spent the remaining portion in honour. Ireland was to England, in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, what England is now to her colonies—the centre of attraction for all who aspire to literary eminence; and St. Patrick was the founder of this flattering state of things.

2. St. Patrick was born in Armorica about the year A.D. 387.<sup>1</sup> At the age of sixteen he was carried captive to Ireland, by “Nial of the nine hostages,” who was at that period ravaging the northern coasts of Gaul. In Ireland he was sold as a slave, and continued for six years to serve as such in the county of Antrim. A shepherd during this period, he continued to nourish in his mountain solitude dreams of future greatness. This continual musing so heated his imagination that in a dream he fancied he heard a voice promising him a speedy return to his country. Heeding this voice he betook himself to flight, escaped from Ireland, and reached Gaul in safety. Soon after his arrival he became an inmate of the monastery of St. Martin, at Tours, where he remained for a period of four years. At the end of this

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<sup>1</sup> Moore's Hist. of Ireland, vol. i, p. 211.—Usher and Fellemon place the date of his birth in the year 372.

time a dream again inspired him with new energy. He fancied that a messenger appeared to him, coming as if from Ireland, and bearing innumerable letters, on one of which were written these words, "The voice of the Irish." At the same moment he fancied that he could hear the voices of persons from the wood of Foclat, near the Western Sea, crying out, as with one utterance, "We entreat thee, holy youth, to come and walk still among us." "I was greatly affected in my heart," adds the saint, in describing this dream, "and could read no further; I then awoke."<sup>1</sup> Soon afterwards he became a pupil of St. German, of Auxerre, and in the year 429, accompanied St. German and Lupus to Britain, in their expedition thither for the purpose of extinguishing the Pelagian heresy.

3. Upon the death of Palladius, the first Irish bishop, Patrick was appointed to succeed him. As might have been expected, he met with opposition upon his first landing, but was at length completely successful. Chiefs and noble ladies, as well as those of inferior rank, heartily welcomed him. He preached, and was thus the means of the conversion of many. He erected churches, established schools, and founded monasteries. He induced the people to abolish many of their heathen practices, and reared upon the sites of their altars for human sacrifice sacred temples to the living God. Multitudes were baptized, priests were ordained, and the means for spreading the doctrines of christianity provided. Even the arch-poet among the Druids was converted by him, and created bishop. Having established the see of Armagh, he ordained Benignus, whom he appointed as his successor, to that see. After a life of eminent christian usefulness, he fell asleep in Jesus in the year A.D. 465.<sup>2</sup>

4. The only authentic remains of his which we possess are his Confession, and a Letter to Coroticus, a prince of some part of Wales; but the exertions he made to promote christianity, and to improve the minds of the people intellectually, by building schools and furnishing them with teachers, the pupils of which eventually became the instructors of Englishmen, entitle him to a prominent place, even in a work like the present.

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<sup>1</sup> Moore's Hist. of Ireland, vol. i, p. 212.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 215, passim.



## PELAGIUS.

5. To the fifth century belongs the celebrated Pelagius,<sup>1</sup> originator of the Pelagian heresy. According to Bede and others<sup>2</sup> he was a Briton, and was probably born towards the close of the fourth century. He belonged to the monastery of Bangor,<sup>3</sup> and passing over into Italy became highly esteemed for his exemplary conduct, and his denunciations against the immorality of the times. After visiting Africa and Palestine, in company with his disciple Celestius, he was banished from Italy by the emperor Honorius, A.D. 418. He inculcated the shocking doctrines that man can merit spiritual rewards by his own unaided exertions; that man is inclined to do right; that the sin of our first parent was confined to himself, and that infants are born holy. He was strenuously opposed by Augustine, yet with singular inconsistency some of the Pelagian doctrines at length crept into the Romish church, and was strongly supported by members of that body, as Duns Scotus, and St. Thomas Aquinas, during the middle ages. Concerning the history of the latter part of the life of Pelagius we are ignorant. The remains of his writings are a Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles, a Letter to Demetria, and a Confession of Faith to Pope Innocent. These are printed in Jerome's writings. He also wrote on "Free Will and the Power of Nature," a fragment of which is preserved in Augustine. Before writing his heretical books, he had acquired a reputation by his works on "Faith in the Holy Trinity," in three books, and by his Eulogies, taken out of the divine scriptures.<sup>4</sup>

## GILDAS.

6. In tracing the history of ancient British writers, we wander in a dark labyrinth, now apparently beholding a ray of genuine light, and now attributing the sensation to an

1 The Welsh name of Pelagius was Morgan.

2 Craik seems to consider him a Scot. "Pelagius, although he has been claimed as a native of South Britain, was more probably, like his disciple Celestius, a Scot; that is to say a native of Ireland, the only Scotia, or Scotland, of this date."—Vol. i, p. 12.

3 "Whether this was the monastery of Bangor, in Wales, or that of Bangor, or Banchor, near Carrickfergus in Ireland, has been disputed." Craik, vol. i, 12.

4 Bede; History of the Britons, by Dr. Giles; English Cyclopædia; Craik.

optical delusion. It is a "will-o'the-wisp" adventure. Yet if we are deceived, it is in the pleasant deception of enchanting romance. The results of the researches of the learned to ascertain the true character of the dark period of our early history often render confusion more confused. To separate between fable and fact little more than ingenious conjecture can be expected. There are preconceived notions to contend with; party spirit and literary antagonism to smother; the desire to obtain originality in opinion to check; and the reconciling of contradictory assertions to perform. We do not wonder then that the results of investigation by different ardent minds should be so diverse. Diverse, indeed, are the opinions respecting the character before us. Whilst such men as Usher and Stephenson contend for the reality of the personage, Gildas, the earliest British historian, Wright on the other hand attempts to show that he is but a fabled character, like many of the heroes of antiquity. I am disposed to believe that Gildas is no fictitious personage. His history, fabled or real, runs thus. Born towards the close of the fifth or beginning of the sixth century, at Dumbarton, he was one of the twenty-four sons of Can or Hen. He received the early part of his education under St. Iltutus, as we learn from an anonymous author, termed the Monk of Ruys, and was early noted for his piety. When but young he passed over to France, there to pursue his studies, where he remained for a period of seven years, and upon his return became a zealous preacher in his native country. He founded a school and church on the coast of Pembrokeshire, to which scholars flocked from all parts of the country. On this coast he preached weekly, and soon acquired a world-wide reputation. Caradoc relates a circumstance connected with him which doubtless enhanced his reputation. Whilst preaching one day he suddenly lost his voice, and ordered all his congregation to leave the church, suspecting that some one of the people was the cause of the impediment. His power of speech, however, did not return with the removal of the people. At length he discovered one Nonnita, a pregnant woman, who afterwards became the mother of the patron saint of Wales, moved aside to escape the notice of the crowd, who thus addressed him: "Ego Nonnita hic maneo inter parietem et januam nolens entrare turbam."

He ordered her out and was then able to conclude his sermon, which done, he predicted the character of the child that she was to bear.

7. He was afterwards invited over to Ireland, where, it is recorded, he became rector of the school at Armagh, founded monasteries, and preached to the people. Whilst there he heard of the death of his eldest brother Huell, who, with his two and twenty brothers, had been engaged in a rebellion against king Arthur, and had been slain by him in the Isle of Mona.<sup>1</sup> He at length determined to visit Rome, to present the Roman pontiff with an extraordinary bell, and in passing through Britain was entertained by St. Cadoc of Lancarvan. Here also, as we learn from Caradoc,<sup>2</sup> numbers of the people flocked to see him. Through the mediation of St. Cadoc, Gildas was reconciled to king Arthur, the king being forgiven for slaying Huell. Gildas at length revisited Rome, presented the bell to the pope, and took a long tour before he returned to his native home. From Rome he went to Ravenna, and thence to Ruys, in Brittany; and French historians affirm that, having founded the monastery of St. Gildas de Ruys, he ended his days there. Caradoc, however, has given a different version of the termination of his life. He informs us that upon the arrival of Gildas at Rome, he was ordered by the pope to take the bell back to Cadoc, who resided at Lancarvan, and who previously desired to have it. Gildas adopted the pope's advice, and returned and dwelt at Lancarvan for a time, and afterwards removed with Cadoc to the islands of Ronech and Echin [Steeppholm and Flatholm] in the Severn. Driven from this retreat by a band of pirates from the Orcades islands, Gildas escaped to Glastonbury, when he, in conjunction with the abbot, was the means of restoring to king Arthur his wife Guenever, who had been carried off by Meluas, king of that district. He died at Glastonbury, in an oratory built by himself. Gildas is represented by his biographers to have separated hostile armies by remonstrance. He is said to have been endowed with the gift of prophecy, and the power to work

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<sup>1</sup> Gidas.

<sup>2</sup> His early biographer



miracles. The exact period of his death, as indeed of his birth, is totally uncertain.<sup>1</sup>

9. Although numerous are the writings attributed to Gildas, modern critics reject all but his "*De excidio Britanniae*." This work contains a brief history of the Britons during the period of the invasions of the Romans, Picts and Scots, and Saxons. In it he speaks most depreciatingly of his countrymen, calling them "crafty foxes" and "timorous chickens;" whilst he endeavours correspondingly to elevate the Roman character. Then follows an epistle of great length, addressed to five kings, upbraiding them for their wickedness, and continually citing examples from holy writ in illustration of his remarks, shewing them the judgments which befel such men as Saul, Jeroboam, &c. His style is most inflated.

#### COLUMBA.

10. I insert the life of this celebrated man here, not in consequence of his character as an author, but because of his exertions to spread christianity, and to provide the people, whose interests he had so much at heart, with better means of instruction. Columba, or Columbkil, the apostle of the Western Isles, was born in Ireland, about the year 521. He was descended from the great Nial, before mentioned, and was consequently of illustrious birth. He has been confounded with Columbanus, also an Irishman and the founder of a monastic system upon the continent; but they were in reality distinct personages. He was educated principally at the celebrated Irish school of St. Finnian, at Clonard. At the age of twenty-five he began to show his partiality for the monastic system, by founding the monastery of Doire Calgach. He subsequently established a second monastery in the district of Meath. Thus were his labours auspiciously commenced.

11. Being imbued with a thorough missionary spirit he, about the year 563, visited Scotland, and obtained a grant of the island of Hy, or Iona (now Icolmkill), from the king

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<sup>1</sup> Life of Gildas, by Caradoc of Lancarvan. Another Life of Gildas, the author of which is unknown, but generally characterized as the Monk of Ruys. *Biographia Brit. Lit.*, article Gildas.

of the Scots. This island had early been distinguished as the seat of Druidism in the north, and it was the first aim of Columba to expel the false teachers. This accomplished, he introduced the purer doctrine of christianity. He erected a monastery and church there, and having arranged other necessary matters for the propagation of the new system of religion, made his way towards the highlands of Scotland. Having subdued opposition, he propagated the gospel in this northern district. He now turned his attention to some other of the western isles, and acted there as he had previously done in Iona and north of the Grampians. Although so busily engaged in his adopted country in the north, he was not insensible to the claims of his fatherland, but appears to have taken the deepest interest in its affairs. Visiting Ireland with his friend king Aidan, he had the merit of interposing his influence for the purpose of saving the Irish bards, who, in consequence of their insolence, were threatened with banishment. His mediation was successful, and they were permitted to remain, a reformation having been effected amongst them. At this period he visited the Irish monasteries and other religious establishments there, and then, returning to Scotland, persevered in the course he appears to have previously marked out for himself. His death occurred about the year 597. A copy of the Four Gospels, said to have been written by him, is still preserved in King's College, Dublin.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Moore's Hist. of Ireland, vol. i, p. 236, *passim*; Eng. Cyclopædia; A. S. Chron., sub. an. 565; Bede's H. E., lib. iii, c. 4, and lib. iv, c. 9.

## CHAPTER XV.

## ANGLO-SAXON WRITERS.

## WILFRID.

1. Many years elapsed after the arrival of the Saxons in England ere we are favoured with any compositions from a Saxon hand. As I have before stated, the Saxons were a barbarous people; their system of letters was most imperfect, and consequently required to be cast in a new mould ere any literary fruits should be produced. The man whose history we are now considering was one of the instruments in preparing the way for such a *denouement*.

2. Wilfrid was born of noble parents in the year 634, and very soon gave proofs of his pious disposition. At an early age he had the misfortune to lose his mother, whose place was but ill-supplied by a step-mother. She took from him his toys, and the handsome dresses in which he had been accustomed to appear before his father's friends. At the age of thirteen or fourteen he left his home and presented himself before queen Eanfleda, wife of Oswy, king of Bernicia, who procured admission for him to the monastery of Lindisfarne. His conduct there was most satisfactory to his superiors, and desiring to visit Rome to learn its ecclesiastical practices, was commended by queen Eanfleda to the monks. She gave him a letter of introduction to her cousin,<sup>1</sup> the king of Kent, who soon afforded him the means of prosecuting his journey to Rome, in company with a young man of destined celebrity—Benedict Biscop. Arriving at Lyons, in France, Wilfrid permitted himself to be detained there for a short space of time by Dalgin, bishop of that city, who had become suddenly attached to him. Dalgin, indeed, offered to receive him as his adopted son, and to give

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<sup>1</sup> Bede, lib. v, c. 12.



him his niece in marriage, if he would remain with him, and would further invest him with the government of a portion of France. These tempting offers, however, he declined, and proceeding to Rome soon gained the friendship of Boniface, the archdeacon and the pope's counsellor, and obtained the information he desired during his stay of a few months there.

3. Wilfrid now returned to Lyons, to his friend Dalfin, with whom he remained for a period of three years. Dalfin intended to make him his heir, had he not himself been massacred by the command of Bathilda, a queen of the Franks. Wilfrid's youth and beauty, and the fact of his being a stranger, rescued him from a similar fate. He now returned to England, and was joyfully received by Oswy, king of Northumbria, and his son Alfrid, whom he had associated with him in the government. He was appointed to the monastery at Ripon, and afterwards ordained priest. Alfrid sent him to France to be consecrated bishop by Agilbert, where he remained a period of three years. Soon after his return he was presented with the bishoprick of York, Chad, the then bishop having resigned in consequence of not having been properly consecrated.<sup>1</sup> Bede informs us<sup>2</sup> that Wilfrid returned from France some time before the arrival of Theodore here, and performed the office of ordination in Kent until Theodore arrived. In the reign of Egfrid, of Northumberland, son and successor of Oswy, Wilfrid was expelled from his see. This disgrace was doubtless brought upon him in consequence of his arrogance, and his endeavour to render ecclesiastical patronage independent of lay interference. Various reasons, however, have been assigned for the step. It has been asserted that the bishop had advised Egfrid's queen to enter a monastery, and had thus displeased him. Again it has been said that the jealousy and animosity of Egfrid's second queen was the cause; she disliking his reproofs and envying his magnificence.

4. Upon his expulsion he repaired to Rome to lay his case before the pope; but on his way thither was driven on the coast of Friesland, where he was honourably received, however, by the barbarians to whom he preached, and was

<sup>1</sup> Chad was afterwards appointed bishop of Lichfield.

<sup>2</sup> Lib. iv, c. 2.

the means of the conversion of many. Arrived at Rome, he was acquitted, as might have been expected; but upon his return to England was committed to prison, whence, after a time, he escaped, and preached to the South Saxons. Bede gives us a most deplorable picture of the South Saxons at this time. Their ignorance was so great, he tells us, that though there had been a famine in the land, in consequence of a lack of rain for three years, and although their rivers abounded in fish yet they had not the sense to catch them. Wilfrid taught them the art of fishing, and upon the day on which the nation was baptized a plentiful supply of rain fell, which induced the people to listen to the spiritual advice of their instructor. The king of the South Saxons, who, as well as his queen, had previously been baptized, gave Wilfrid a portion of land at Selden, where he founded a monastery. In the reign of Aldfrid, successor of Egfrid, Wilfrid was restored to his see of York; but in the space of five years he was again deposed, and again fled to Rome for protection. The pope acquitted him a second time, and forwarded letters in his behalf to Aldfrid of Northumbria and Ethelred of Mercia. Alfrid, however, was firm in his opposition to the bishop, and it does not appear that he again obtained his see. Returning, however, to his monastery of Ripon, worn out with anxiety and bodily infirmity, he breathed his last in the year A.D. 709.

5. Wilfrid was a great patron of architecture. His biographer, Eddius, has given a full description of his designs. His exertions in the kingdom of the South Saxons rescued the last part of England from the darkness of paganism. His writings, however, which are not supposed to have been numerous, have been all lost. Those attributed to him are a Treatise on Easter, the Acts of the Council of Whitby, some Letters, and a Rule for his monks.<sup>1</sup>

#### BENEDICT BISCOP.

6. If Wilfrid prepared the way for the education of the Saxon people by his pious and unwearied exertions in en-

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<sup>1</sup> The history of Wilfrid has been given by three biographers, Bede, Eddius, and Eadmer. See the admirable history collated from these biographies by Mr. Wright. *Biographia Britannica Literaria*, Anglo-Saxon period.

deavouring to effect their reformation, Benedict gave a more palpable illustration of his exertions by building monasteries, introducing learned men into them, collecting books, and teaching the people. He was a great traveller, and his journeys were undertaken with a definite motive, viz., the collection of books and other useful materials for his monasteries.

7. Benedict was born about the year 629, of Saxon parents, in Northumbria. At an early age he was instructed in military affairs, and his reputation soon acquired for him the friendship of Oswy, by whom he was appointed his minister. Oswy enriched him with several grants of lands; these, however, he despised, and at the early age of twenty-five made a journey to Rome with Wilfrid as has been previously related. After an absence of nearly ten years, which period he spent in Rome in unceasing study, he returned and was well received by Alfrid, (who then reigned in Northumbria in conjunction with his father) and by him was sent to Rome again. After a stay of a few months he returned to the island of Lerin, in Provence, received the tonsure, and became an inmate of the abbey there, where he remained during a space of two years. At the expiration of this period he visited Rome a third time, and returned to England in company with Theodore, the new archbishop of Canterbury. Theodore very soon made him abbot of the monastery of St. Augustine, at Canterbury, which office he retained for a period of two years and then set out again for Rome. Here he obtained numerous books and relics, in addition to those he had previously collected, and returned to his native province of Northumbria, and attached himself to Egfrid, the then king. Egfrid granted him land near the mouth of the Wear, where he erected the monastery of Wearmouth. For the building of this monastery he went over to Gaul and obtained masons and glaziers. By great exertions the building was soon finished after Roman models. "Stones and glass were first used by him," says Malmesbury; *i. e.*, the stones were first laid in regular lines in the erection of his buildings. This monastery was dedicated to St. Peter. Again he visited Rome for the purpose of obtaining those fittings for his monastery which could not be collected elsewhere. Books, relics, and paintings were



secured during this visit which were carefully preserved. It was during his stay at Rome this time that he secured abbot John, arch-chanter at St. Peter's at Rome, to return with him to instruct his monks in singing. John was ordered by his master, the pope, to observe the spiritual condition of the English people, which he appears to have carefully done, and transmitted a satisfactory account of it to the pontiff. After this, Benedict obtained more land from Egfrid, on the Tyne, and erected another monastery at a place called Yarrow, or Jarrow. This monastery he dedicated to St. Paul. For the sixth and last time he visited Rome, taking with him as heretofore his faithful friend Ceolfrid, whom he had made sub-abbot of one monastery, as he had Easterwin of the other. He returned again laden with precious books and pictures, thus rendering his monasteries the most celebrated in England. Soon afterwards he was afflicted with palsy, and from this disease he suffered three years. He died in the year 690, having appointed Ceolfrid as his successor. Although Benedict is asserted to have written several works, yet, like those of Wilfrid, they have all perished. His name, however, deserves to be recorded among the Anglo-Saxon literati, if we regard him simply as the collector of so many works in that age of book-dearth. He was, however, a teacher, and it is to be regretted that so eminent a scholar should not have left one specimen of the fruits of his learning.<sup>1</sup>

#### CAEDMON.

8. The language of our Saxon forefathers has been arranged under three heads: the British-Saxon, the Danish-Saxon, and the Norman-Saxon.<sup>2</sup> The only remains of writings in British-Saxon are the metrical lines of Caedmon, inserted in Alfred's translation of Bede, whose history we now briefly propose to notice.

9. Bede informs us that Caedmon was in the service of the monks of Whitby, attending to their horses, and consequently spent his early days in ignorance. It appears

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<sup>1</sup> Bede, Roger of Wen., Wm. of Malm., Bio. Brit. Literaria.

<sup>2</sup> Warton's Hist. of English Poetry, pp. 1 and 2.

that our Saxon forefathers were fond of amusing themselves, displaying their musical attainments at the hour of supper by singing, and playing upon the harp. Upon one of these festive occasions, when Caedmon was present, he, to avoid the shame of passing the harp round instead of playing and singing, vexedly hurried to his home. In the night visions a stranger appeared to him, and said, "Caedmon, sing some song to me." He replied, "I cannot sing." The stranger, however, would receive no denial, and ordered him to sing of the beginning of created things. He composed an ode, awoke, and remembered it. In the morning he went to the steward, and told him of his night performance, and was thereupon brought before the abbess and the learned inmates of the monastery, and repeated his poem to them. It was perfectly successful, and he was ordered to prepare in verse a passage of holy writ read over to him, which he satisfactorily accomplished, and presented it to them on the following morning. He was now requested to take upon himself the monastic habit, which he did, and devoted the remainder of his life to the composition of sacred poetry. Being unable to read himself, the sacred history was repeated to him by the monks, and he, "keeping in mind all he heard, and as it were chewing the cud, converted the same into harmonious verse." His works are thus enumerated by Bede:<sup>1</sup> "He sang the creation of the world, the origin of man, and all the history of Genesis: and made many verses on the departure of the children of Israel out of Egypt, and their entering into the land of promise, with many other histories from holy writ; the incarnation, passion, resurrection of our Lord, and his ascension into heaven; the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the preaching of the apostles; also the terror of future judgment, the horror of the pains of hell, and the delights of heaven; besides many more about the divine benefits and judgments, by which he endeavoured to turn away all men from the love of vice, and to excite in them the love of, and application to, good actions." Caedmon's song is preserved in Alfred's translation of Bede, and is literally translated in Turner's

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<sup>1</sup> Lib. iv, c. 24.

History of the Anglo-Saxons,<sup>1</sup> which translation I take the liberty of transcribing :

Now should we praise  
 The guardian of the heavenly kingdom,  
 The mighty creator;  
 And the conceptions of his mind.  
 Glorious father of his works,  
 As he of every glory  
 Eternal Lord !  
 Established the beginning.  
 So he first made  
 The earth for the children of men,  
 And the heavens for its canopy.  
 Holy creator,  
 The middle region,  
 The guardian of mankind,  
 The eternal Lord,  
 Afterwards made  
 The earth for men ;  
 Almighty ruler !

Caedmon has justly been denominated the father of English poetry. His writings resemble in character and style the works of Milton.

10. "When the time of his departure drew near," says Bede, "he laboured for the space of fourteen days under a bodily infirmity which seemed to prepare the way, yet so moderate that he could talk and walk the whole time." He asked his attendants to take him to the dead house, a place where persons likely to die were carried, and at midnight requested that the Eucharist should be administered to him. He enquired if they were all in charity with him, and upon their answering in the affirmative, and a rejoinder as to whether he were in charity with them, he replied, "I am in charity, my children, with all the servants of God." Soon after this, falling into a slumber, he ended his life in silence.<sup>2</sup>

#### ADAMNAN.

11. The history of the personage before us is, though brief, of a most interesting character ; for it is the history,

<sup>1</sup> Vol. iv, lib. vi, c. 4. Wherever the fourth volume of Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons is referred to in the course of this work, the edition of 1805 is meant. References to vols. i, ii, iii, belong to Longman's new edition.

<sup>2</sup> Bede, lib. iv, c. 24.



not only of a man of learning, but of one open to conviction, earnest in his christian duties, and of one who "as a writer holds the remarkable position of being probably the first native of our islands who incited the Anglo-Saxons to that long pilgrimage which had afterwards such an important influence on the civilization of the world, by publishing a description of the Holy Land."<sup>1</sup> The date of Adamnan's birth is uncertain. He was the fourth abbot of the monastery founded at Iona, by Columba, and is introduced to us by Bede as an ambassador to Aldfrid, king of Northumbria, (who was educated at Iona) to obtain restitution for an invasion on the Pictish dominion by his brother Egfrid, whom he had now succeeded. He was eminently successful, and secured the release of sixty captives whom he brought back with him. His residence at the court of Aldfrid induced him to become a supporter of the Romish time of keeping Easter, and, retiring to Iona, endeavoured to persuade the monks to become converts to his opinion. In this, however, he signally failed. Visiting Ireland shortly afterwards, he was there more successful, the Irish nation agreeing to the change. Returning to Iona, he again used his persuasion to induce the monks to sanction the Romish time; but again in vain. "Worn out with mortification and regret" he expired in the year A.D. 704.

12. He was led to write a history of the holy places of Judea from the following circumstance. Arculf, a French bishop, had visited the land of promise, Damascus, Constantinople, and many islands, and upon his return was driven upon the western coast of Scotland. After a time he visited Adamnan, and was hospitably received and entertained by him. Arculf related to Adamnan what he had seen and heard in his travels, and Adamnan committed his story to writing, which work is still extant. Bede has given us extracts from it in his Ecclesiastical History, the following being a specimen: "Bethlehem, the city of David, is seated on a narrow ridge, encompassed on all sides with valleys, being a thousand paces in length from east to west; the wall low without towers, built along the edge of the plain on the summit. In the east angle thereof is a sort of natural half

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, *Bio. Brit. Literaria*, p. 263.

cave, the outward part whereof is said to have been the place where our Lord was born; the inner is called our Lord's manger. This cave within is all covered with rich marble, over the place where our Lord is said particularly to have been born, and over it is the great church of St. Mary.'<sup>1</sup> He also published a separate abridgment of it. Adamnan wrote also a History of St. Columba, which is likewise preserved.<sup>2</sup>

#### ALDHELM.

13. We now approach the history of the father of *Anglo-Latin* poetry, Aldhelm, the most celebrated pupil of archbishop Theodore and abbot Adrian. Aldhelm was born in Wessex, about the year 656. Darkness was upon the face of the earth when Aldhelm's star of light arose. He was the son of Kenter, a kinsman of king Ina,<sup>3</sup> and was thus nursed in the bosom of royalty, with such advantages as were in that rude age attendant upon such a state. His superior station in life gave him opportunities offered to but few at that period. And thus the age in which he lived, and the circumstances with which he was surrounded, contributed to the formation of the character of this great scholar. When but a child he was committed to the care of Adrian, who must soon have discovered from the rapidity of his progress that he was no ordinary pupil. After remaining under Adrian's care for some considerable time, as is supposed, he returned to Malmesbury and placed himself under Meildulf, Maidulf, or Macdulf, a learned Irish monk, who had established himself there, and was endeavouring to improve the means of his maintenance by teaching. He did not long remain under the learned Irishman, however, for we very soon find him returned to his old friend and preceptor, Adrian, in Kent, for whom he appears to have entertained a warm affection. The severity of his studies under Adrian again prostrated him, and once more com-

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<sup>1</sup> Bede H. E., lib. v, c. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Bede H. E., lib. v, c. 15; Bio. Brit. Lit., A. S. period; Moore's Hist. Ireland, vol. i, p. 285.

<sup>3</sup> Some assert that he was the nephew of Ina.

pelled him to take refuge amidst the sylvan beauties of Malmesbury.<sup>1</sup>

14. We are fortunately not left in ignorance of the nature of the studies in which Aldhelm engaged. In a letter to Adrian he explains that Roman jurisprudence, the metres of Latin poetry, arithmetic, astronomy, and astrology all had a share of his attention. Thus his acquirements were no less various than deep. The knowledge of that rude age was almost monopolized by him; none of his Saxon brethren were his equals; and it may be fairly doubted whether any foreigner in England excelled him.

15. Although a mere head stuffed with knowledge does not necessarily qualify a man for the pedagogue's seat, yet it must be confessed that it is an important acquisition to all pretenders to it. Combined with the ardent zeal for the instruction of his fellowmen which Aldhelm possessed, we do not wonder that his scholastic engagements were attended with success, and that scholars from France and Scotland placed themselves under his superintendence. Thus have we briefly delineated the character of this important Anglo-Saxon personage under the phases of a student and teacher.

16. Such a character, in such an age and with such alliances, could not long remain in comparative obscurity. We learn that about this time (*i. e.*, towards the close of the seventh century) a monastery was founded at Malmesbury, and Aldhelm appointed abbot. His energy in this sphere soon displayed itself. There was no time for sleep in that hour of darkness, as Aldhelm too plainly discovered. Through his exertions the monastery was greatly enriched by splendid donations of land, bestowed upon it by the rich. Nor was his activity confined to the abbey of Malmesbury, for we find that he founded religious houses at Frome and Bradford. The religious controversies of the time did not escape the notice of Aldhelm, who warmly engaged in the dispute concerning the proper day for the observance of Easter, and other church matters. During the time that he lived at Malmesbury it is recorded of him that he addressed

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Henry (Hist. Eng., vol. iv, c. 4) upon the authority of *Anglia Sacra*, c. ii, p. 23, says that he received the earliest part of his education from Maedulf, then visited France and Italy for improvement, and upon his return became a pupil of Adrian's.



the people as a minstrel in the open air, and by this means led many people to a knowledge of the truth. Thus were the effects of "open air" preaching made manifest in his day.

17. The exalted character of Aldhelm's exertions and literary excellences finally procured for him the highest honours. He was at length made bishop of Sherborne. This bishoprick extended its jurisdiction over Dorset, Somerset, Wilts, Devon, and Cornwall. He did not live long, however, to enjoy the honours heaped upon him, for his death happened about four years afterwards, according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, in the year 709. The most extraordinary miracles have been ascribed to him, as indeed to most of the great men of the times. Our ancestors, it would seem, thought that a man could not be really great without being endowed with almighty power.

18. As an author, he was a man of exuberant fancy, and gifted with the true qualities of a poet. Some specimens of of his compositions which are preserved are of the highest order. Though Turner justly condemns his profuse imagery, and the continual neglect of his subject to exalt his metaphors; yet I cannot but think that he is unnecessarily severe when he remarks that he [Aldhelm] illustrates his illustrations till he has forgotten both their meaning and applicability. William of Malmesbury, an ardent admirer of the poet, greatly eulogizes his writings. Speaking of his style, he says, "from its acumen you would think it to be Greek; from its splendour, Roman; and from its pomp, English." Allowing these remarks to be the exaggeration of fancy, and even admitting the imperfections pointed out by the learned Mr. Turner, I cannot but regard his poetry as belonging to the highest class; whether I consider the depth and originality of thought displayed, its happy illustrations, or its majestic clothing. I subjoin a specimen, translated in Turner's History, from which my readers may judge for themselves.

Almighty Father! Sovereign of the world!  
Whose word the lucid summits of the sky  
With stars adorned, and earth's foundation framed;  
Who tinged with purple flowers the lonely heath,  
And check'd the wandering billows of the main

Lest o'er the lands the foamy waves should rage ;  
 Hence rocks abrupt the swelling surge control.  
 Thou cheer'st the cultured field with gelid streams,  
 And with thy dropping clouds the corn distends.  
 Thin orbs of light expel night's dreary shade ;  
 Titan the day, and Cynthia tends the night.  
 From thee what tribes the fields of ocean roam,  
 What scaly hosts in the blue whirlpools play !  
 The limpid air with fluttering crowds abounds,  
 Whose prattling beaks their joyful carols pour,  
 And hail thee as the universal Lord,  
 Give, Merciful ! thine aid, that I may learn  
 To sing the glorious actions of thy saints.<sup>1</sup>

This is doubtless a favourable specimen, but by no means a singular one.

19. Aldhelm is the first Anglo-Saxon whose Latin poetry has reached us. His prose writings are open to more serious objections than his poetry. His fanciful alliteration, and other absurd whims, (in common with the Anglo-Saxon writers of that period) must be condemned *in toto* ; nevertheless, an allowance must be made for him in consideration of the age in which he lived. The fastidious taste of his readers had to be consulted, and that this taste was met by Aldhelm is proved by the opinion of Malmesbury quoted above, and from the estimation in which his writings were so long held. William of Malmesbury thus apologizes for his writings: he observes, "they [Aldhelm's works] may excite disgust in some persons, not duly considering how modes of expression differ according to the customs of nations." Indeed, speaking generally, the writer who studies not the peculiar tastes of the times in which he lives will rarely obtain distinction during the period of his own existence, however much succeeding generations may be disposed to honour him.

20. Aldhelm not only wrote Anglo-Latin poetry and prose, but he is also said to have written poetry in Anglo-Saxon, though no fragment of it remains to us. His principal works are a Treatise on Virginité (*De laude Virginitatis*), and his *Ænigmata*. Besides these, however, he wrote a poem on the eight principal vices, a Treatise on Metres, a Treatise on Easter, and other poems.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> History of the Anglo-Saxons, vol. iv, p. 346.

<sup>2</sup> Bede, Wm. of Malm., Bio. Brit. Lit., Turner's Hist. of the Anglo-Saxons.

## HILDA.

21. Of all the persons who interested themselves in the spiritual advancement of the Saxons few appear more prominent than the subject of the present memoir. Although not a writer herself (as far as we have means of judging), she was nevertheless the instructoress of those who were destined to influence the character of their countrymen by their pens as well as by their example. Several bishops received the rudiments of their education in the monastery of which she was the abbess, viz., Bosa, bishop of York; Hedda, bishop of Dorchester (and afterwards of Winchester); John of Beverley, bishop of Hexham, translated to York; and Wilfrid, bishop of York,—and it is on this account that her name is introduced here. Hilda was the daughter of Hereric, of the royal stock of Eadwin,<sup>1</sup> and was converted to christianity through the preaching of Paulinus, the first archbishop of York. After her conversion she intended to pass over to the monastery of Cale, in France, where her sister Hereswid lived. Detained by bishop Aidan, she at length became abbess of Hartlepool. In this capacity she introduced many reforms, and received the counsel and instruction of bishop Aidan and other learned men. After this she founded the monastery of Whitby, and became its abbess, introducing the same discipline which had already made her name famous at Hartlepool. Here she spent the remainder of her days, zealously and piously occupying her time. Bede relates a dream that her mother had previously to her birth, which he interprets as referring to Hilda. He says that whilst her father, Hereric, lived in banishment, her mother, Bregusuit, dreamt that she was searching for him most carefully, but in vain; that at this time she discovered a most precious jewel under her garment, which, whilst she was examining it, cast such a light as spread itself throughout all Britain.

22. At the controversy respecting Easter, in the reign of king Oswy, when Colman and Wilfrid took important parts, Hilda sided with the Scots, in opposition to the Roman customs. Her prudence and sagacity were such, that kings and bishops sought her advice, and her fame was very widely

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<sup>1</sup> Roger of Wendover.



extended. Before her death she was afflicted with a long and painful illness, for, falling into a fever, she suffered for six long years from a violent heat, and in the seventh year departed this life A.D. 680, in the sixty-sixth year of her age. It is related that a nun in the monastery of Hackness (thirteen miles from Whitby) had a vision the same night in which she died, and saw her soul borne to heaven by angels. A nun in her own monastery had a similar vision.<sup>1</sup>

## JOHN OF BEVERLEY.

23. How vast is the influence which an ordinary mind has over those persons with whom it comes in contact! How immensely is that greatness increased in the case of a master spirit of the age! Theodore visited Britain. He came from radiant Rome to witness the deep darkness of Britain—a darkness which might be felt. He and his companion Adrian shed abroad those rays of intelligence with which they were endowed. Crowds of pupils gathered round them, eager to receive the touch of their mantles. We have already noticed the illustrious Aldhelm, and now another of their pupils is before us—the quiet John of Beverley. John of Beverley is introduced in this place, not in consequence of his literary productions,—for we have no extant remains of his, although sermons and letters have been attributed to him—but in consequence of the position which he sustained, viz., that of a public teacher. He appears to have been born in the village of Harpham, in Yorkshire, and to have received his first instruction under the abbess Hilda. Upon the arrival of archbishop Theodore in England, John became one of his pupils, and appears to have made rapid progress in classical studies. Upon his return to his native district he opened a school, and among other illustrious characters the young Bede became one of his pupils. His reputation increasing, and his connection with royalty by the ties of friendship, procured him the bishopric of Hexham, which was at length exchanged for the archbishopric of York.

24. His love of solitude was also conspicuous, and he at

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1 Bede's Ecclesiastical History.

length, in the year 718, retired to the monastery at Beverley, which he had founded, and died there about three years afterwards, *i.e.*, in the year 721.<sup>1</sup>

25. Bede narrates several extraordinary miracles of his, some of which, however, (an allowance being made for the narrator's exaggeration) may be explained as the natural effects of applied remedies. That the efficacy of the prayers of John, in recovering the sick, was perceptible we doubt not. Scripture sets before us the consequences which might be expected to result from a christian's prayers,<sup>2</sup> and experience confirms the truth of the promise. Yet the extraordinary miracles related of him could only have gained credence in a superstitious age, some of which, for curiosity's sake, I will lay before my readers. We are told by Bede of a dumb man who was cured by the perseverance of the bishop; of a virgin in the monastery of Watton who was taken ill, and was bled in the arm, that the arm swelled, the damsel was confined to her bed, and her death expected, when John opportunely arrived, said a prayer over her, gave her his blessing, and the maid afterwards recovered. At another time he healed an earl's wife, by giving her holy water to drink, and requiring her to wash the place where her greatest pain was. This immediately effected her recovery, and she was able to wait upon the bishop whilst he dined with her husband. Again, we are told of his restoring a servant to life by his prayers, although the said servant had lost the use of his limbs, and the coffin had been provided for his burial. By his prayers he also cured one of his clerks, who had been badly hurt by a fall from his horse. We are told, moreover, by Roger of Wendover,<sup>3</sup> that after his death the people of Beverley bound the fiercest bulls and turned them into the cemetery where the bishop was buried, and that they immediately became tamed. The narrative of some of his miracles, however, is not only interesting but instructive. In the curing of the dumb we find the same method adopted by a churchman upwards of eleven hundred years ago as in its general features is pursued in our best asylums at the present day. I give a circumstantial account of this miracle

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1 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

2 James v, 15.

3 Flowers of History, p. 135.

in the words of Bede : " There was in a village, not far off, a certain dumb youth known to the bishop, for he often used to come into his presence to receive alms, and had never been able to speak one word. Besides, he had so much scurf and scabs on his head that no hair ever grew on the top of it, but only some scattered hairs in a circle round about. The bishop caused this young man to be brought, and a little cottage to be made for him within the enclosure of the dwelling, in which he might reside, and receive a daily allowance from him. When one week of Lent was over, the next Sunday he caused the poor man to come into him, and ordered him to put his tongue out of his mouth and shew it him ; then laying hold of his chin, he made the sign of the cross on his tongue, directing him to draw it back into his mouth and to speak. ' Pronounce some word,' said he ; ' say yea,' (which in the language of the Angles is the word of affirming and consenting, that is ' yes' ). The youth's tongue was immediately loosed, and he said what he was ordered. The bishop, then pronouncing the names of the letters directed him to say A ; he did so, and afterwards B, which he also did. When he had named all the letters after the bishop, the latter proceeded to put syllables and words to him, which being also repeated by him, he commanded him to utter whole sentences, and he did it. Nor did he cease all that day and the next night, as long as he could keep awake, as those who were present relate, to talk something, and to express his private thoughts and will to others, which he could never do before ; after the manner of the cripple, who, being healed by the apostles, Peter and John, stood up leaping and walking, and went with them into the temple, walking and skipping and praising the Lord, rejoicing to have the use of his feet, which he had so long wanted. The bishop, rejoicing at his recovery of speech, ordered the physician to take in hand the cure of his scurfed head. He did so, and with the help of the bishop's blessing and prayers, a good head of hair grew as the flesh was healed. Thus the youth obtained a good aspect, a ready utterance, and a beautiful head of hair ; whereas before he had been deformed, poor, and dumb."<sup>1</sup> The character of

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1 Bede, lib. v, c. 2.



practical surgery in those days may, to a certain extent, be deduced from the application ordered by the bishop, and from the caution he gives the abbess of Watton. Referring to the second miracle alluded to above, "He asked when the maiden had been bled, and being told that it was on the fourth day of the moon, said, 'You did very indiscreetly and unskilfully to bleed her on the fourth day of the moon; for I remember that archbishop Theodore, of blessed memory, said that bleeding at that time was very dangerous, when the light of the moon and the tide of the ocean are increasing.'<sup>1</sup>

#### BEDE.

26. The next Anglo-Saxon writer we shall notice is the venerable Bede, a name held in the highest reverence, not only by his countrymen who were contemporary with him or who immediately succeeded him, but by all students of history even at the present day. The qualities of this great and good man were most exemplary, and there are few persons who may not derive a useful lesson from the study of his life, scanty as the materials for writing his biography are; and fewer still who may not obtain the most useful instruction from his writings. Living at a period when gross darkness had enveloped the minds of the people; when opportunities for prosecuting literary researches were few; and when the difficulties to be surmounted in accomplishing such purposes were many, Bede emphatically points out to us what may be done by perseverance. He clearly demonstrates that a willing mind may accomplish apparent impossibilities.

27. Bede was born about the year 673 A.D., somewhere in the territories of the monastery of Wearmouth, as he himself informs us.<sup>2</sup> According to William of Malmesbury it was in that portion of the territory adjoining Scotland.<sup>3</sup> This spot, according to the glowing language of the same writer, was a perfect paradise at the time: "it exhaled the graceful odour of monasteries," "it glittered with a multi-

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<sup>1</sup> Bede, *Bio. Brit. Lit.*

<sup>2</sup> *Lib. iv, c. 24.*

<sup>3</sup> *Wm. of Malmesbury's Chron., lib. i, c. 3.*

tude of cities," it witnessed "vessels borne by gentle gales on the calm bosom of the haven" of the Wear. Here was Bede born, here he lived, and here he died.

28. He informs us that at the age of seven he was committed to the care of the abbot Benedict, and was instructed by him, and afterwards by Ceolfrid. He was taught theology by Trumhere, chanting from one John, who had arrived from Rome; and further had received the valuable assistance of the learned John of Beverley, the disciple of Theodore. Such valuable assistance to a man so diligent in his studies as Bede soon rendered its effects apparent, and thus was he able, as William of Malmesbury expresses it, "to dazzle the whole earth with the brilliancy of his learning."

29. He informs us that he spent his days in the monastery of Wearmouth and Jarrow, yet it has been averred that he visited Rome, though there does not seem sufficient authority to support the assertion. He was probably invited to Rome by the pope Sergius, but he appears to have been prevented from going thither, as it has been suggested, by the unexpected death of Sergius. The account he has given us of his own labours accurately describes his diligence. He says: "I wholly applied myself to the study of the scriptures, and amidst the observance of regular discipline, and the daily care of singing in the church, I always took delight in learning, teaching, and writing." His studies had a wide range, extending to every subject then taught.

30. He was admitted to deacon's orders at the early age of nineteen, and to priest's orders in his thirtieth year. The unusually early age at which he was made a deacon gives us an idea of the estimation in which his character was held at this early period of his life. The scene of his labours being confined, the materials for his personal history are meagre in the extreme. We can judge of the character of his life, however, from his writings, and from the touching narrative of his death, written by his disciple Cuthbert. He appears to have been a man of delicate constitution. Upon one occasion, in a letter which is still extant, he excuses himself from visiting his friend, the archbishop of York, on the plea of illness. The complaint in his stomach from which he then suffered, brought on probably by intense study, seems never to have left him, and at length terminated his labours.

During his last illness the words of the Bible were continually in his mouth, evidencing the effect they must have had upon his heart. His labours for the benefit of the people extended to his last moments, he being engaged in the translation of St. John's gospel during the whole of his illness. He finished this work only in time to utter the doxology, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," and then gently expired.

31. His works were very numerous, the most important of which is his Ecclesiastical History, containing an account of the history of Britain from the earliest period down to the year 731. The most wonderful miracles are here related, as are, indeed, in every other work of any pretension at this early period of our history. Bede informs us that he was assisted in the work by the abbot Albinus, and the pious priest Nothelm, Daniel, bishop of the West Saxons, the abbot Esuis, and the brethren of different monasteries: these men furnishing him with information upon his various subjects.

#### EGBERT.

32. Egbert, archbishop of York, next claims our notice. Of royal blood, being the brother of Eadbert, king of Northumbria, he possessed an authority which few even in those days enjoyed. Not only noble by birth, but pious in character, he introduced reforms which in other hands might have been deemed impossible. As a scholar, he was anxious to procure copies of the writings of the great, and thus induced, formed a library, at once the rival of Benedict's and the admiration of the world.

33. We are informed that Egbert was educated at Hexam by bishop Eata, and that afterwards travelling to Rome was there ordained. Returning, he soon received what his learning and noble birth entitled him to, viz., the archbishopric of York. There had been no archbishop of York since the time of Paulinus, and the state of his see was consequently most discouraging. He, however, obtained the pall from the pope, which entitled him to assume the title of archbishop. He now directed his attention to the



reformation of his diocese, and he was fortunate in receiving the suggestions of Bede, who directed his attention to numerous existing abuses in a letter still preserved.

34. The library which he formed at York was of a noble character for those days. It consisted of the following works :

*Ancient fathers*: Jerome, Hilarius, Ambrosius, Austin, Athanasius, Gregory, Leo, Fulgentius, Basil, Chrisostom, Lactantius, Eutychius, Clemens, Paulinus.

*Ancient classics*: Aristotle, Pliny, Cicero, Lucan, Boetius, Cassiodorus, Arator, Virgil, Statius, Orosius, Pompeius.

*Ancient grammarians and scholiasts*: Probus, Donatus, Priscian, Servius, Pompeius, Comminianus.

*Other*: Poets, Victorinus, Sedulius, Juvenecus, Fortunatus, Prosper.

Alcuin, in a letter to king Eadbert, thus alludes to this library:<sup>1</sup> "Give me the more polished volumes of scholastic learning, such as I used to have in my own country, through the laudable and ardent industry of my master, archbishop Egbert. And if it please your wisdom, I will send some of our youths, who may obtain thence whatever is necessary, and bring back into France the flowers of Britain; that the garden of Paradise may not be confined to York, but that some of its scions may be transplanted to Tours."

35. The noble character of Egbert is thus drawn in a few words by William of Malmesbury. He was "one who thought that, as it is over-reaching to require what is not our due, so it is ignoble to neglect our right." Henry of Huntingdon says that he was archbishop of York thirty-six years. In Bede's "Continuation," however, it is asserted that he was made archbishop A.D. 732, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle places his death in the year 766.

36. The chief works of Egbert were his *De Ecclesiastica Institutione*, *Excerptiones* from the Church Canons, *The Confessionale*, and *Penitentiale*. These works, as Mr. Wright remarks, are now extremely valuable for the light they throw on the names and condition of our forefathers in the eighth century.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wm. of Malmesbury, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Wm. of Malmesbury, *Bio. Brit. Lit.*

## BONIFACE.

37. It has been our pleasant duty to notice a steady improvement in the literary character of the Saxons from the time of Caedmon to that of Bede. Theodore's and Adrian's learning is illustrated in the life of Aldhelm. We were hardly prepared for its climax when Bede flourished, so low, comparatively speaking, was the general state of learning in this country even at that time. It will now be our painful task to notice the decline of learning, and to enquire how this retrograde movement was brought about. Monasteries had increased in numbers, libraries had been founded, learning had become a little more respectable in the eyes of the public,—and yet, notwithstanding, learning declined. Three chief causes may be suggested to account for this decay. Civil contests, or internal struggles, widely prevailed. External enemies—the piratical Danes—were continually harassing the country. A greater interest for learning was provoked on the continent, and consequently higher rewards offered there. These great uniting causes produced the deplorable effects alluded to, viz., the decay of learning in England. Boniface was one of the few men who could then have stimulated the Anglo-Saxon population to renewed zeal in the cause of educating the mind; but he left his native country to propagate the principles of his religion amongst the heathen Teutones, and at length accepting foreign honours, lived and died abroad.

38. Boniface was born in Devonshire, in the year 680. His original name was Winfrid. In consequence of precocious indications of piety, he was early sent to a monastery at Exeter. From thence he removed to Southampton, where, in a monastery under abbot Wynbert, he zealously prosecuted his studies. Ordained priest at the age of thirty, he soon conceived the idea of preaching to the Germans. At the age of thirty-six he went to Friesland, and, visiting Utrecht, communicated personally with the barbarian prince, Radbad, upon the subject next his heart. Unsuccessful in that quarter, he returned to England. In the year 718 he visited Rome, and, under the papal sanction, commenced his labours amongst the Thuringians. Partial success attended

his efforts here, but after a time he visited France. Thence he proceeded again to Utrecht, where he continued for a space of three years, and then returned to his former district—Thuringia. Returning to Rome at the invitation of Gregory II, he was ordained bishop; and afterwards, with the sanction of Charles Martel of France, renewed his labours among the Thuringians. Numerous difficulties awaited him, not only from the opposition of the heathens, whose spiritual condition he sought to improve; but also from his intemperate zeal in rigidly adhering to immaterial matters of form. Numerous Saxon missionaries were invited by him to co-operate in his labours, whom he elevated to dignified offices in the church. By the advice of one of his converts he was determined to destroy one of the chief objects of the pagans' adoration—a venerable oak. The heathen imagined that this oak would be protected by their gods; but the axe of Boniface, aided by a strong wind, soon destroyed the tree, to the great astonishment of the ignorant spectators. In the year 732 he was made archbishop by Gregory III. In the year 736 he attempted the conversion of the Saxons. Returning to Rome after visiting Hessa, he remained there until the year 740. He was in the year 745 appointed archbishop of Mentz. After various difficulties and contentions with the popes, Boniface visited the Frislanders, whom he had first desired to convert; but was at length massacred by them, together with several accompanying priests, in the year 755.

39. Boniface has justly acquired the title of the Apostle of Germany. Few men, perhaps, have ever been instrumental in producing more good than he. Despising the comforts and emoluments of a courtly life; fearless in rebuking even popes when he considered that their actions were objectionable; indefatigable in what he deemed to be the path of duty, he has left a character in many points worthy of the highest admiration.

40. The writings of Boniface were not numerous. The chief of those which are extant consisting of letters addressed to popes, kings, and bishops. The following extract from one of these shows his fearless conduct in repressing the errors of his time. Besides his letters he wrote poems still



extant, whilst many of his works upon other subjects have doubtless been lost:<sup>1</sup>

“To Ethelbald, my dearest lord, and to be preferred to all other kings of the Angles, in the love of Christ; Boniface, the archbishop, legate to Germany from the church of Rome, wishes perpetual health in Christ. We confess before God that when we hear of your prosperity, your faith, and good works, we rejoice; and if at any time we hear of any adversity befallen you, either in the chance of war or the jeopardy of your soul, we are afflicted. We have heard that, devoted to alms giving, you prohibit theft and rapine, are a lover of peace, a defender of widows, and of the poor; and for this we give God thanks. Your contempt for lawful matrimony, were it for chastity’s sake, would be laudable; but since you wallow in luxury, and even in adultery with nuns, it is disgraceful and damnable: it dims the brightness of your glory before God and man, and transforms you into an idolater, because you have polluted the temple of God. Wherefore, my beloved son, repent, and remember how dishonourable it is that you, who, by the grant of God, are sovereign over many nations, should yourself be the slave of lust to his disservice. Moreover, we have heard, that almost all the nobles of the Mercian kingdom, following your example, desert their lawful wives and live in guilty intercourse with adulteresses and nuns. Let the custom of a foreign country teach you how far distant this is from rectitude. For in old Saxony, where there is no knowledge of Christ, if a virgin in her father’s house, or a married woman under the protection of her husband, should be guilty of adultery, they burn her, strangled by her own hand, and hang up her seducer over the grave where she is buried; or else, cutting off her garments to the waist, modest matrons whip her and pierce her with knives, and fresh tormentors punish her in the same manner as she goes from town to town, till they destroy her. Again the Wenedi,<sup>2</sup> the basest of nations, have this custom; the wife on the death of her husband casts herself on the same

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<sup>1</sup> The above account of the life of Boniface has been taken chiefly from the *Bio. Brit. Lit.*, A. S. period, p. 308, &c.

<sup>2</sup> The Wenedi were seated on the western bank of the Vistula, near the Baltic. In Wilkins it is “*aqua Persas*,” among the Persians.

funeral pile, to be consumed with him. If then the Gentiles, who know not God, have so zealous a regard for chastity, how much more ought you to possess, my beloved son, who are both a christian and a king? Spare, therefore, your own soul; spare a multitude of people, perishing by your example, for whose souls you must give account."<sup>1</sup>

## ALCUIN.

41. Alcuin was one of the most noble ornaments among the Anglo-Saxons. Whether we consider his learning, as displayed in the extant remains of his works—or his wisdom, as exemplified in his letters—we cannot but feel proud of so noble an ancestor. Although he spent but the early portion of his life in Britain, he lived here long enough to render his name famous; and, if he was of an ambitious turn of mind, he must have witnessed blighted hopes, and have seen his pupils preferred before him. We do not wonder, therefore, at his embracing the patronage of the then greatest of European kings, and have undertaken to reside where there was a greater prospect of success attending his labours, and those labours better appreciated.

42. Alcuin was a native of Northumbria, and was educated at York, under Egbert and his successor Aelbert (Ethelbert). Ethelbert having succeeded to the see of York, and also to the management of Egbert's school, ordained Alcuin deacon, and gave up to him the charge of the school and library. The studies pursued at York at this period were grammar, rhetoric, poetry, astronomy, and natural philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Ethelbert died in the year 780, and Eanbald,<sup>3</sup> one of Alcuin's pupils, succeeded him. Being sent to the court of Charlemagne, respecting a treaty of peace, he so captivated the heart of that penetrating monarch that he was earnestly solicited, and finally induced, by him to remain there. The emperor desired his assistance in

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<sup>1</sup> Wm. of Malm., pp. 73 and 74; Life of Boniface.

<sup>2</sup> Turner.

<sup>3</sup> Wm. of Malmesbury. Mr. Wright states (Bio. Brit. Lit., p. 350) that he had been to Rome to obtain the pallium for Eanbald, and upon his return, meeting Charlemagne was induced by that monarch to reside with him in France.

promoting some praiseworthy reforms which he had in contemplation. Here, we are told, he taught the king "a thorough knowledge of logic, rhetoric, and astronomy." Perhaps, however, the children of Charlemagne were more efficiently taught by him than their parent.

43. Alcuin returned to England on political business in the year 780, and was for some time detained here in consequence of the state of the kingdom; but, after a period of two years, returned to his old friend and benefactor. The counsels of Alcuin frequently tempered the rage of Charlemagne, and rendered him less exacting: thus was his influence exerted in the cause of humanity.

44. Old age stealing upon him, Alcuin at length determined to return to England and there end his days; this resolution, however, was abandoned in consequence of the reports of the unsettled condition of his country which reached him. He therefore contented himself with writing, reproving, and advising the kings and bishops then in authority. The monastery of St. Martin, at Tours, was at length given him, and here he ended his days, and was buried in the church of St. Martin.<sup>1</sup> Towards the close of his life there was a temporary difference between him and Charlemagne, in consequence of his too stoutly defending the privileges of his church. His funeral, however, was conducted with the greatest pomp by the beneficence of that monarch.

45. The writings of Alcuin, both in poetry and prose, are numerous, consisting of various epistles, epigrams and epitaphs, commentaries on the holy scriptures, tracts on various moral and religious subjects, and treatises on grammar and rhetoric. Many of his letters to Charlemagne still exist. They contain valuable information respecting himself and the times in which he lived—sentiments the most sublime, and advice the most excellent. In one of them he observes: "I spend my time in the halls of St. Martin in teaching some of the noble youths under my care the intricacies of grammar, and inspiring them with a taste for the learning of the ancients; in describing to others the order and revolutions of those

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<sup>1</sup> According to Wm. of Malmesbury, in the church of St. Paul at Cormaric.



shining orbs which adorn the azure vault of heaven; and in explaining to others the mysteries of divine wisdom which are contained in the holy scriptures; suiting my instructions to the views and capacities of my scholars, that I may train up many to be ornaments of the Church of God, and to the court of your imperial majesty. In doing this, I find a want of several things, particularly of those excellent books in all arts and sciences which I enjoyed in my native country through the expense and care of my great master Egbert. May it therefore please your majesty, animated with the most ardent love of learning, to permit me to send some of our young gentlemen to England to procure for us those books which we want, and transplant the flowers of Britain into France, that their fragrance may no longer be confined to York, but may perfume the palaces of Tours. I need not put your majesty in mind how earnestly we are exhorted in the holy scriptures to the pursuit of wisdom, than which nothing is more conducive to a pleasant, happy, and honourable life—nothing a greater preservative from vice—nothing more becoming or more necessary to those, especially who have the administration of public affairs, and the government of empires. Learning and wisdom exalt the low, and give additional lustre to the honours of the great. *By wisdom kings reign and princes decree justice.* Cease not then, O most gracious king to press the young nobility of your court to the eager pursuit of wisdom and learning in their youth, that they may attain to an honourable old age and a blessed immortality.”<sup>1</sup>

46. Notwithstanding his intimacy with Charlemagne he had a continual care for his English home. Thus writes Malmesbury: “He [Alcuin] says thus to the monks of Wearmouth, among whom Bede had both lived and died, obliquely accusing them of doing the very thing he begs them not to do: ‘Let the youths be accustomed to attend the praises of our heavenly king, not to dig up the burrows of foxes, or pursue the winding mazes of hares; let them now learn the holy scriptures, that when grown up they may be able to instruct others. Remember the most noble teacher of our times, Bede, the priest, what thirst for learn-

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<sup>1</sup> Turner, vol. iv, pp. 438, 439.

ing he had in his youth, what praise he now has among men, and what a far greater reward of glory with God.' Again to those of York he says, 'The searcher of my heart is witness that it was not for lust of gold that I came to France, or continue there; but for the necessities of the church.' And thus to Offa, the king of the Mercians: 'I was prepared to come to you with the presents of king Charles, and to return to my country; but it seemed more advisable to me, for the peace of my nation, to remain abroad, not knowing what I could have done among those with whom no one can be secure, or able to proceed in any laudable pursuit. Behold, every holy place is laid desolate by pagans, the altars are polluted by perjury, the monasteries dishonoured by adultery, the earth itself stained with the blood of rulers and of princes.'"<sup>1</sup>

#### ASSER.

47. Asser, the subject of the present narrative, appears before us in the important capacity of private tutor to king Alfred. Of his early history we know nothing, and of the subsequent events of his life very little. What information we do possess of him is chiefly derived from his biographical account of Alfred. Ingulph informs us that he was bishop of Bangor, though others affirm that he was bishop of St. David's.<sup>2</sup> That he had possessions in Wales we learn from his own words.<sup>3</sup> Paying king Alfred a visit at Dene, he was invited by that patron of learning to remain in England and devote himself to his service. Rich rewards were offered to him by Alfred, as inducements to comply with his request. Asser replied that he could not hastily agree to such a proposition, as he thought it would be unjust to leave his former patrons, who had heaped upon him many kindnesses. The king then desired his attendance in England during one half of the year, if he spent the remaining half in Wales. This request, however, Asser could not comply with until he had consulted his Welsh friends. Four days after Asser left the

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<sup>1</sup> Wm. of Malmesbury.

<sup>2</sup> See Dr. Giles's Introduction to the six Old English Chronicles in Bohn's series.

<sup>3</sup> Asser's Life of Alfred.

court to re-visit his native land, promising the king to return to him again, after a period of six months, with a satisfactory answer. He had not proceeded far, however, before he was attacked by a violent fever, and was compelled to remain in the city of Winchester, where he halted for twelve months. It does not appear that he actually returned to Wales before he again visited the king, and promised to spend one half of his time in England. He states that he was induced to comply with the king's wishes in the hope of securing assistance for his friends against a petty king of Wales, who had often ravaged the Welsh monastery to which he belonged. We know too much of the human mind, however, to be satisfied with this specious pretext. The court was doubtless a comfortable place, and the patronage of so powerful a prince as Alfred was of too much importance to be slighted, even by the most unambitious. So agreeable to him, indeed, was his new situation, that his first stay with the king lasted for a period of eight months instead of three.<sup>1</sup>

48. We are not left in ignorance of the occupation of Asser whilst at court. One of his duties was to read before the king, doubtless from such classical works as the king could not master. Another duty was to prepare the works for Alfred which he desired to translate, by glossing them over.<sup>2</sup> A third duty undoubtedly was to assist Alfred in his studies of the classical languages. A fourth duty was to write choice quotations for the king in a small book called his *Enchiridion*, or *Manual*, which "became almost as large as a psalter." And well was Asser rewarded for his services. The two monasteries of Amesbury and Banwell were put into his possession. He was made bishop of Exeter,<sup>3</sup> much to his astonishment, and was afterwards translated to the see of Sherborne.<sup>4</sup>

49. William of Malmesbury speaks of Asser as being well skilled in learning; and had we not this distinct assurance from one who doubtless had better opportunities of ascertaining his real character, from MSS. now lost, than we

1 Asser's Life of Alfred.

2 Wm. of Malmesbury. Introduction to Gregory's Pastoral.

3 Asser.

4 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.



have, we may readily deduce it from those writings of his which are still preserved; and yet more decisively from the interest taken in him and his employment by the discriminating Alfred. The writings ascribed to him are numerous, though the only work generally acknowledged is his *Life of Alfred*, valuable as containing much original information. He died in the year 910.<sup>1</sup>

#### PLEGMUND AND WEREFRITH.

50. Plegmund and Werefrith were two of those men whom king Alfred delighted to honour. As was before observed, Plegmund was invited from Mercia and made archbishop of Canterbury. He was promoted to this office in consequence of the fame which he had acquired for literary qualifications, Alfred's determination being to improve the southern portion of his kingdom through the exertions of such men as he. To him has been ascribed the honour of writing the early portion of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, though upon very doubtful authority.

51. Of Werefrith we have before briefly spoken, and, indeed, only briefly could we speak of him. He is introduced here in consequence of the part he took in assisting Alfred in his scheme of improvement. He was made bishop of Worcester; but in consequence of the invasions of the Danes he retired into France. He returned to England in consequence of an invitation from Alfred, who employed him in translating *The Dialogues of Pope Gregory and Peter*, his disciple, from Latin into Saxon, which he performed by sometimes putting sense for sense, and interpreting them with clearness and elegance. A copy of his translation still exists in *Corpus Christi College, Cambridge*.<sup>2</sup>

#### ODO.

52. Odo was one of those men who rise by good natural abilities and indomitable perseverance to distinction. Driven from his home by his father, who was a Dane, for listening

<sup>1</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chron.*

<sup>2</sup> *Asser's Life of Alfred*; *Bio. Brit. Lit., A. S. period*; *Rapin's His. Eng.*, vol. i, p. 115.

to the preaching of the gospel, he took refuge in the house of one of Alfred's nobles, named Ethelwulf, and was instructed, through this nobleman's kindness, in the Latin and Greek languages. In these studies he speedily acquired a reputation, and at length followed his patron to Rome. He afterwards distinguished himself at Brunanburg, and was at length rewarded by Athelstan with the archbishopric of Canterbury. It is said, however, that he accepted the honour with great reluctance. He afterwards became the tool of Dunstan in displacing the secular clergy and substituting the new order of monks. The old chroniclers speak of his treatment of Edwy and his wife in terms of praise, though we cannot but regard it with feelings of abhorrence. After the exile of Dunstan, Odo separated Edwy and his queen, and, as we have before related, treated the latter with the utmost cruelty. Odo was chiefly instrumental in depriving Edwy of a part of his kingdom, and, as a natural consequence, of his life. That he was a learned man we have no reason to doubt, though one single letter is all that we possess of his writings.<sup>1</sup>

#### ETHELWOLD.

53. We have anticipated the most important part of the history of Ethelwold with which we are acquainted in relating the history of Edgar; for that portion was spent in founding and repairing monasteries, and in carrying out therein the Benedictine rules. Hence he is styled "the benevolent bishop," the "father of monks."<sup>2</sup> His training commenced at an early age, and being of noble family he was soon introduced to the court of Athelstan. He became an inmate of the monastery at Glastonbury when Dunstan held the abbacy; was at length removed thence and made abbot of Abingdon, and in the year 963<sup>3</sup> was made bishop of Winchester. The great purpose of his life being a determination to improve the monastic system, we find him the year after his consecration<sup>4</sup> dismissing the secular priests of

1 Bio. Brit. Lit.; Wm. of Malmesbury; Rapin, vol. i, pp. 115, 116.

2 A. S. Chronicle, sub. an. 934.

3 Ibid, 963.

4 A. S. Chron., Hy. of Huntingdon.

Winchester and introducing monks. In this attempt he was warmly supported by Edgar and Dunstan. Great indignation was excited against him, in consequence of these cruel and unjust actions, in the minds of those whom he had ejected, and it is even stated that they attempted to poison him.<sup>1</sup> He, however, little regarded complaints against what he doubtless deemed a sacred duty. The reason assigned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for this treatment of the secular priests is "that they would not observe any rule," which information is expanded by his biographer, Walstein, into an assertion that they led dissolute lives. Doubtless they were not guiltless in this respect, neither did their substitutes and successors acquire any very exalted character for their purity of living.

54. Having begun his projected reformatations at home, taking advantage of the royal patronage he proceeded to extend his system of reform to other monasteries also. Ely received his first attention, over which he placed Britmoth as abbot. Then he repaired the monastery of Medehamstead, which he called Burgh (Peterborough). In restoring this place, papers were found relating its early history. These writings were taken by him to the king, who granted a charter to the monastery confirming the gifts previously awarded to this monkish habitation.<sup>2</sup> Ethelwold had the chief share and honour in promoting the restoration of the forty-eight monasteries during the reign of Edgar, mentioned by Ingulph. Ethelwold was a patron of the arts, and in the numerous monasteries he restored and churches he rebuilt he had ample opportunities for encouraging them. He was no less an admirer of learning, and his perseverance in endeavouring to obtain information rendered him one of the first scholars of his day. He resembled the great Alfred, not only in the ardour with which he prosecuted his studies, but also in his desire to diffuse the blessings of knowledge amongst his countrymen. He was a teacher. He rejoiced in the opportunity afforded him for instructing the young in the intricacies of the Latin tongue, and in reading to them from Latin books in their native Saxon. He was charitably disposed too, as the following illustration will show. Upon

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1 Bio. Brit. Lit., p. 436.

2 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.



one occasion he ordered the plate of his monasteries to be exchanged for food when famine and pestilence were stalking abroad in the land, "observing that 'the precious metals were better employed in feeding the poor than in administering to the pride of the ecclesiastics.'"<sup>1</sup> Hence we perceive the justice of the epithet in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, of "the benevolent bishop." His only literary work which remains to us is his Anglo-Saxon translation of the Rule of St. Benedict.<sup>2</sup> He died in the year 984.<sup>3</sup>

DUNSTAN.

55. Those peculiarities of human nature which induce us to delight in the marvellous realm of fiction seem to be particularly dominant in the early ages of a people's history. Nothing then is so attractive as the wonderful, no matter how absurd soever it may really be. A person must then work miracles to obtain distinction. A tale must then relate to the marvellous to secure a patient audience or an attentive reader.<sup>4</sup> The histories of Greece and Rome, of China and India, refer us to periods of time so wonderful, events so miraculous, personages so exalted, with which those of the present day can in no wise compare. And so is it in the comparison of ancient and modern British history. That the race of heroes, this the reign of common-place pigmies of humanity. Then the priesthood, armed with the authority of St. Peter, or at least with that of St. Peter's successor, could bid dumb images speak, restore health to the sick, predict the character of forthcoming men and times. To none of those ancient worthies do the above remarks more eminently apply than to the "blessed St. Dunstan."

56. Dunstan was born in Somersetshire, in the year 925, of noble parents. The extraordinary character of this great man, according to ancient chroniclers, was presaged before his birth. We are told that his mother, then *enciente*, being

1 Bio. Brit. Lit., A. S. period, p. 440.

2 Ibid.

3 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

4 See Macpherson's Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland, p. 10.

engaged in public worship "on the day of the purification of the blessed virgin Mary, the whole concourse of the city being in church with burning tapers, when the priest had adorned himself with the sacred vestments for the solemn service of the altar, on a sudden, whether by chance or by the will of God, all the lights were extinguished. In the midst of the general amazement the taper of Dunstan's mother took light, and, by communicating it to the rest, restored the joy of all."<sup>1</sup> Dunstan was early admitted into the school at Glastonbury monastery, and appears to have made rapid progress, not only in mental acquirements, but also in mechanical arts. His teachers were principally Irish monks who had settled there. Arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music were there taught him, as well as biblical lore.<sup>2</sup> The forge was, perhaps a greater luxury to him than the book; at any rate the proficiency he attained in smithery indicates a natural inclination in that direction. Mr. Wright, on the authority of his ancient biographers, Bridferth, Adalard, and Osbern, relates one of those extraordinary incidents of his life, with which the lives of ancient *saints* were embellished, or rather I should say disfigured. Intense study at a very early age threw the young Dunstan into a violent fever. All hopes of his recovery had vanished, and his friends even surrounded his bedside expecting immediate dissolution. But Dunstan was not so near death as the fears of his friends had led them to anticipate. For suddenly he arose in ecstasy, seized a spear, and scampered in haste over the neighbouring district. Upon his return at night he ascended the abbey church, which was then being repaired, by a most perilous route, and balanced himself upon the battlement. He then descended into the interior, and laid himself between the two keepers, who were much astonished when they awoke at finding a child between them asleep, especially since the outer doors were closed.

57. Having finished his education at Glastonbury, he was presented to king Athelstan by his uncle Athelm, archbishop of Canterbury. His pre-possessing appearance and graceful manners soon won for him the favour of royalty.

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<sup>1</sup> Roger of Wendover.

<sup>2</sup> Moore's Hist. of Ireland, vol. i, p. 133, on the authority of Wm. of Malmesbury; Life of Dunstan.

The good fortune of the favourite, however, soon deserted him. Dunstan was accused of sorcery by the jealous courtiers of Athelstan, who were so far successful in their designs against him, that he was compelled to retire from court. He now took refuge with his uncle Alfheh, bishop of Winchester.

58. This was the turning point in Dunstan's life. He had become the victim of Cupid. He was in love with a lady of noble birth and exquisite beauty; but Alfheh, who intended that his young nephew should become an ornament to the church, for which he foresaw his abilities fitted him, advised him to devote himself to a life of celibacy. Dunstan objected; but that aversion which persuasion could not overcome succumbed before sickness. He was taken ill. The cause of his illness was attributed to the divine displeasure at his obstinacy, and Dunstan was induced to vow to accede to his uncle's wishes if he should recover. He was restored to health, and the ardent lover was transformed into the gloomy but zealous monk. He built himself a cell so low that he could not stand upright in it, and here secluded himself from the world. Reports of his sanctity now rapidly spread. In his solitude he had perpetual struggles with demons, who were ever haunting him, and as often he of course came off victorious. Upon one occasion he seized the devil by the nose with a pair of tongs, (his Satannic majesty having intruded upon him whilst he was working at his forge) who naturally howled so fearfully at this rough treatment that the whole neighbourhood for miles round was disturbed.

59. In the reign of Edmund, Dunstan was restored to royal favour, and became the king's chief adviser. The malignancy of his enemies, however, still followed him, and he was again banished the court. The circumstances attending the alarming hunting expedition of Edmund, before related, induced that monarch to recall him, and to invest him with the abbacy of Glastonbury. He now proceeded to the monastery of Fleury, and, having made himself acquainted with the strict rules of that abbey, returned to Glastonbury and introduced them there. The secular clergy were expelled, and regular monks introduced. Through the



bounty of Edmund, Glastonbury was richly endowed, and the fame of Dunstan rapidly spread.

60. Dunstan enjoyed the full confidence of Edred, the successor of Edmund. Upon the retirement of his chancellor, Turketul, Dunstan obtained unlimited power over the king and his treasures. This influence was exerted by him in carrying out his schemes of ecclesiastical reform, and the monasteries of Glastonbury and Abingdon became richly endowed through his patronage. Edred offered him a bishopric, which he modestly declined, though honour was evidently the chief aim of his ambition.

61. The death of Edred proved most unfortunate to the wily schemes of Dunstan. Edwy accused him of malversation in his office during the previous reign, and he was banished from the kingdom. Edwy's miserable reign was soon terminated, however, and the accession to the undivided sovereignty of England by Edgar proved the signal for Dunstan's return. Royal honours were now awarded him in rapid succession. The sees of Worcester, London, and finally the archi-episcopal see of Canterbury, were successively conferred upon him. His authority in England became supreme, and even the powerful Edgar was overawed by the creature of his bounty. As an instance of this we may observe that the stern prelate enjoined a seven years' penance upon him for carrying off a nun, and during that period the king was forbidden to wear his crown.

62. We have before related the miracles he was compelled to perform to secure his credit and uphold his authority in his contests with the advocates of the privileges of the secular clergy in the reign of Edward, the successor of Edgar. With increasing age, increasing disrespect of Dunstan and his miracles progressed. He had ruled with a rod of iron, by means of trickery the most blasphemous, and his death was hailed with satisfaction by numbers who had felt the effects of his severity. He died in the year 988, as is said, and may readily be believed, of grief and vexation. His literary character is so ably summed up by Mr. Wright that I take the liberty of transcribing it. He observes: "The whole tenour of Dunstan's life shows that his mind was distinguished more by its extraordinary activity, than by a tendency to solitude and contemplation; his leisure

employments were chiefly works of the hand, the mechanical sciences, and the fine arts. Yet he appears to have been a man of considerable learning, and not devoid of literary taste. Although he regarded the scriptures, and the writings of the theologians, as the grand object of study to Christians, yet he taught that the writings of the poets and other ancient writers were not to be neglected, because they tended to polish the minds and improve the style of those who read them. His favourite studies were arithmetic, with geometry, astronomy, and music, the quadrivium of the schools, the highest and most difficult class of scholastic accomplishments. He is said to have imbibed his taste from the Irish monks, who cultivated science with more zeal than literature. He also employed much time in his youth in writing and illuminating books, and in making ornaments of different kinds; for he excelled in drawing and sculpture. He appears to have possessed little taste for literary compositions, for we hear nothing of his skill in poetry; he attained no reputation for eloquence, and the writings which have been attributed to him, of little importance in their character, are such as would have originated in the necessity of the moment. But his influence on the literature of the country was great; the innumerable monasteries which grew up under his auspices became so many schools of learning, and the few writings of that period which now remain must be but a small portion of the numerous books which perished with the monasteries in which they were written, during the new series of Danish invasions which prevented their being re-copied and multiplied."<sup>1</sup>

63. The chief literary production of Dunstan which has been handed down to us is his Concord of Monastic Rules.<sup>2</sup>

#### ALFRIC OF CANTERBURY.

64. There has been much diversity of opinion respecting this Saxon writer. Mr. Wright has dissected the contradictory evidence respecting the history of Alfric and his

<sup>1</sup> Wright, p. 457.

<sup>2</sup> Wright, *Bio. Brit. Lit.*; *Chronicon Monasterii de Abingdon*; *English Cyclopaedia*; Roger of Wendover; *Ingulph.*

works with great ability, and has given us a most interesting narrative of his life, from which this sketch is chiefly taken. He was probably born early in the tenth century, and was made archbishop of Canterbury in the year 995. Born of a noble family, he yet received his early instruction from an ignorant priest; but subsequently becoming a disciple of the learned Ethelwold, he laid the foundation of that learning which afterwards rendered him so conspicuous. He became abbot of Cerne, in Dorsetshire, then bishop of Wilton, and very soon afterwards archbishop of Canterbury. He did not enjoy this dignity long, however, dying in the year 1006.

65. The writings of Alfric differed from most of those of his contemporaries, inasmuch as they were written in the Saxon language. The purity of his object in thus writing deserves our warmest commendation. No less than eighty homilies were either translated or composed by him, produced in Saxon, that his illiterate countrymen might not be debarred from the benefit of their study. The purity of the doctrines set forth in these sermons led the reformers to study their contents, and were thus the means of awakening an interest in the study of the Anglo-Saxon tongue. At a time when the few compositions of the Saxons were written in inflated Latin sentences, a glossary being often deemed essential to the comprehension of their meaning, it is refreshing to find so eminent a man as Alfric writing in so easy a Saxon style as to be considered by the learned Mr. Wright as the best Anglo-Saxon guide to be placed in the hands of a modern student of the language.

66. No less than eighteen different works have been attributed to Alfric, amongst which, in addition to the homilies, may be mentioned a Latin Grammar, which procured for him the title of Grammaticus; a Glossary of Latin Words most commonly used in conversation; The 'Colloquium, or conversation in Latin, with an interlinear Saxon glossary; a Manual of Astronomy; a Translation of the Heptateuch; Treatises on the Old and New Testament, and on the Trinity. Most of the writings of Alfric are still extant.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bio. Brit. Lit.; A. S. Chron.; English Cyclopædia.













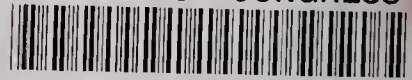








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